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RELIGIOUS HERMENEUSIS IN THE POST-MODERN AGE

Edited by

John B. Chethimattam

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Religious Hermeneusis in the Post-Modern Age

Edited by

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Editorial

In the extraordinary consistory of Cardinals convoked by Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, April 4-7, 1991, Cardinal Josef Tomko, Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples made a spirited speech against the position of Indian theologians on their approach to dialogue with other religions. He mentions several basic facts emphasized by Indian theologians, gives his own interpretations of them, and states that the consequences are alarming and that "the Holy See can no longer remain passive". The points he mentions are common place: The finite and created humanity of Jesus of Nazareth cannot exhaust the infinite reality of the Divine Logos. In other religions too, in their holy founders and in their millennia old Scriptures there are manifestations of the Logos, or "the seeds of the Word". One cannot absolutize the model of Chalcedon, addressing a particular situation and particular set of opposing theories arising from the Antiochian and Alexandrian contexts against the background of Greek philosophy. Though it defined the formula of one person in two natures in Christ, it left it ambiguous whether that one person is the pre-existent Logos. The Christological titles were given to Jesus later, from the same particular Greek cultural context, and were, therefore, interpretations. The Kingdom of God and the divine economy of human salvation embrace also other religions since, as Vatican II readily admits, through them the great majority of humanity get answers to the fundamental questions of life and existence. A good part of evangelization and conversion work has been, and, to a great extent, still is "the result of Western chauvinism and intolerance". The primary mission of the church is building God's kingdom, and dialogue with other religions is an important means to that end. No sound theology can deny these facts.

But the problem with Cardinal Tomko is that he takes all these points as constituting "a gnostic relativism", levelling "all religions, different religious experiences and beliefs to a least common denominator". Jesus Christ himself is brought down,

according to Tomko, to the common level of other religious founders and "the person of Jesus Christ is relativized". But this is obviously a misinterpretation of the position of Indian theologians since the religious pluralism they affirm excludes the search for such a common denominator. Each one of the many religions is unique and has made its unique contribution to the religious heritage of humanity. Even the word religion is not applied to them all in a univocal sense, but rather analogically as referring to the ultimate concerns of human existence. The roles attributed to Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, Mahaveera and others in their respective religions are radically different. The concept of salvation and final human fulfilment they present also are not conceived in the same way. Also the concept of the church or the assembly of believers, is taken differently by different religions. Besides, the opposition Tomko sees in between christocentrism and theocentrism is recognized today as false and irrelevant: One cannot be christocentric without recognizing Christ as Son, the second person of the Trinity of God, and this means falling back into theocentrism. The opposition between the Church and the Kingdom of God, again, is false, since the Church itself is a pilgrim people continuing the mission Christ received from the Father to establish His Kingdom!

Cardinal Tomko's complaint about "the abandonment of missionary stations.. by missionaries, the clergy and women religious, and the flight to social work, as well as the...talk about the values of the kingdom (justice and peace)" only indicates that the real problem is with the Roman authorities, who fail to read the signs of the times. The Prefect of the Roman Congregation for Evangelization is going back to the colonialist idea of mission as conquest and domination. The very expression "missionary stations" is reminiscent of those old outposts of foreign culture, maintained by foreign money and often by foreign personnel. Situated outside the village and operating from the outside, doling out American wheat and American milk-powder or running English medium schools for the benefit of the children of the wealthy, they invested the Church with an offensive foreign look. They were a real liability in the effective communication of the Good News of salvation to all free and freedom-loving children of God with a certain pride in their national identity. Today a

new concept of mission has evolved particularly in India. For example the late Bishop Paulinus Jeerakathil, when he took up the leadership of the Jagdalpur diocese, insisted that his priests should live right in the villages, that their houses, churches and schools conform to the style and size of the people's houses, and that they should formulate their message and service according to the actual needs and concerns of the people, more often than not primarily temporal and cultural. So there evolved a real originality and healthy diversity than mere blind conformity! This is not an exception but an evolving general pattern.

Moreover, Cardinal Tomko's position regarding the missions clearly contradicts "the new evangelization" proclaimed by Pope John Paul II at the very beginning of his pontificate and consistently followed up ever since. On his first visit to Poland after his election, on the occasion of celebrating the first millennium of Christianity there, the Pope said in a homily at Nowa Huta on June 9, 1979: "In this new epoch, in these new conditions of life...we have to initiate a new evangelization". He went on to detail the physiognomy of that new evangelization in terms of the centrality of the Cross, response from faith to new conditions of life and new challenges faced by the people, the close link between the Cross and human labour, and the emphasis on human creativity, the dignity of labour and the dignity of man (see Oss. Rom. 24-06-79, pp. 6 & 8). Four years later, in an allocution to the Polish episcopate on June 19, 1983 at the Marian Sanctuary of Jasna Gora John Paul II added another element to this "new evangelization", the option for the poor and the concrete commitments this implies according to the different situations. "The Church of the poor signifies that it assumes different commitments in different parts of the globe in favour of man, his spiritual and material needs and his fundamental and inalienable rights, ...This commitment forms part of the programme of evangelization" (Oss. Rom. 3-7-83). He made the same appeal to the Latin American bishops at Port of Prince, Haiti, on March 9, 1983 (Oss. Rom. 20-03-83). In a speech at the airport of Santo Domingo in October 1984 referring to the coming half-millennium of Christianity in Latin America he said that what is needed is not a re-evangelization but a new evangelization, a new light from Christ to initiate a transformation from within the heart of man, in the structures

and the society of today. It should help to implant a new civilization based not in hatred and in conflicts, but in love (Oss. Rom. 21-10-84, p. 7). In 1985, visiting Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela the Pope repeats the same call for a new evangelization: "A new evangelization has to infuse a desire for holiness re-discover and strengthen those Christian values implied in the faith of the people, so that it can be a response to the new situations and exigencies of our times, so that the Gospel can be a motive force to help the brother more in need" (Oss. Rom. 17-2-85, pp. 8 & 9). The same year speaking to the Episcopal Conference of Belgium, Pope John Paul II defined the new evangelization as "facing the realities of a pluralistic society, of secularization, laicism, alienation from religious institutions and religious indifference including atheism" (Oss. Rom. 9-6-85, p.9).

One cannot fail to note the sharp difference between the ideals of the Polish Pope John Paul II and the ideas of the officials of the Roman curia. Vatican II fought the curial mentality and made an honest effort to de-Romanize the Church. But what we see today all over the world is a frantic effort to re-Romanize it. The baneful effects of that old colonialist policy are typically in evidence in Latin America. In a population that is 70-90% Catholic, the people are caught between an authoritarian state and an equally authoritarian ecclesiastical leadership. The elite are alienated from the Church and fall into religious indifferentism and agnosticism. The common people are left without real religious leadership. Dom Fernando Mauro, bishop of Duque Caxias and Sao Joao Meriti in Brazil explained the difficulties faced by his church in its relations with the Roman curial authorities. He spoke, by way of example, about a speech prepared by a group in Rome for the Pope to be delivered to the Brazilian bishops during his visit to Brazil: It overstated the Roman authority over the local churches. "I do not know when or how, but the Pope tore it up: and the part that dealt specifically with the bishops' conference was completely redone... The Church has some structural problems, and unless these are changed we can expect no real peace in the church. I believe the Vatican State is an obstacle, not just for other churches but for ourselves. It is a world power. For me, the papal nunciatures are not expressions of the Gospel; they are the long arm the Vatican uses to control everything...

For example, as long as the papal nuncio is the only one in the country who makes decisions about bishops' appointments, we will not have any real change... In the last ten years, the process of choosing bishops has been quite visible: they have been chosen from religious congregations and dioceses that are considered orthodox and safe... We have to talk more about the role the Church has to play and not try to impose a new Christendom" (*LADOC*, Lima, Peru, vol. 17, 5, May/June, 1987, pp. 9-14). Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee, Wisc. U.S.A., put the problem more mildly in a conversation: "For some of the bishops who have spent no time in Rome, there is a mystique about the place, and they tend to fall back on Rome in matters of theology. 'Will Rome be pleased?' they ask themselves. I spent thirteen years in Rome; the Vatican is demythologized for me. It is not the repository of truth and right thinking that some make it out to be - not at all. I know what happens in the back rooms there, so, frankly, I spend little time forecasting what Rome may think" (reported by Paul Wilkes, *The New Yorker*, July 22, 1991, p. 53, col.2).

Right from the conversion of Constantine through the missionary work of Western colonial powers down to our own times evangelization has been to a certain extent tainted by the spirit of christendom mixing religion with politics. For Latin America the historic conference of bishops at Medellin in 1968 which launched Liberation Theology was an event in the spirit of Vatican II. It proclaimed the preferential option for the poor as the basic orientation of the Gospel. What is implied here is not a mere strategy of communication, but rather the very structure of thought in the pursuit of truth. Father Jose Aldunate S. J. of Chile who was awarded the Oscar Romero medal for his defense of the poor against political oppression says: Pre-Vatican morality was a morality of absolute principles. Post-Vatican morality discerns the specific situations and springs from historical reality in order to transform it... Our continent embraces at the same time the universe of the poor and the ferment of Christian faith" (*LADOC* vol. 17, 5, pp.15-18). Hence evangelization should not pitch Christianity as a philosophy opposed to and competing with other religious systems. It is a search for the fullness of truth in collaboration with other religions.

Nor is it imposing the ideas, values and culture of the upper classes on the lower strata of society. This is particularly relevant in the present post-modern and post-scientific age. The various theologies of liberation emphasize a methodology based on specific faith experiences, in interaction with the social, political and economic reality. For the same reason they are also somewhat radically different according to the different situations. Thus the main concerns of Leonardo Boff, writing in Brazil are ecclesiological. Noting the paucity of priests to minister to vast areas of land he places the emphasis on the role of the laity over against the domination by church authorities. Gustavo Gutierrez, the leading liberation theologian in Peru has to deal rather with the tension which exists in the affirmation of faith in the God of life when the reality is that of a world of death and sin. "How can we speak about a God who reveals himself as love", he asks, "in a reality marked by poverty and oppression? How can we speak of a God of life to persons who suffer premature and unjust death?"

So *Jeevadharma* is devoting this issue to a discussion of religion and interreligious dialogue in the context of the present post-modern search for truth. The main article discusses the evolution of the present day methodology and its implications. The Editor of the issue, further more, personally interviewed a number of specialists in different fields of competence, from different parts of the world and recorded their responses to the issues discussed here. Fathers Gerald O'Collins, Jacques Dupuis, Francis Sullivan and Jean Galot from the Gregorian University, Rome, and Dr. Richard Viladesau of Fordham University, New York, address the issues as theologians., Dr. J. Verstraaten of the Louvain University speaks as a sociologist, while Dr. J. Selling from the same University, speaks as an ecumenist and moral theologian. The contributions from our friends in Latin America are particularly important as coming from people actively involved at the grass-roots level. Jorge Alvarez Calderon is a native Peruvian deeply involved in liberation theology in its application to the life of the people. Manuel Diaz Mateos, a Spanish Jesuit, living and working at Lima, Peru for over thirty years, speaks as a New Testament scholar. Dr. Norberto Strotmann m.s.c., dean of theology at the Santo Toribio seminary in Lima, Peru, is also a sociologist who adds a voice different from that of Liberation Theologians. Fr. Jose

Perepadan of Dharmaram College, Bangalore, presents in his article a brief [description of the Biblical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur as a theoretical framework for the discussion. These different scholars help us to see the emerging theology at the close of this 20th century.

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The Christian Hermeneusis and Other Religions

The present situation of religious and cultural pluralism is somewhat unsettling to many Catholics, especially those who place great importance on traditional ecclesiastical structures. Particularly the Western church, which was for centuries accustomed to deal with only one single religious tradition and a single culture, looks confused with the recent explosion of major World Religions facing humanity in the post-World-War era. To them Europe was the whole world, and America was the 'new' one. In both the only religion was Christianity. The presence of a few scattered Jews with no basis of their own was just a nuisance. Muslims were far away and Hindus and Buddhists unheard of. Hence their whole religious language reflected the political mood of European nations and was imperialist and colonialist in attitude and texture. The only dialogical element in Christian theology was its response to the Jewish thought which the New Testament writers took as their point of departure and the Greek philosophical framework the post-Apostolic Christian writers sought to adopt. But this one dimensional Christianity which still remains the mainstay of Western theology looks very inadequate to do justice to the Gospel since it flies in the face of many fundamental points even of Christian faith. In this article I shall briefly examine the different ways the main points of the Christian message like the person of Christ and salvation were and are approached, the problems they raise, and explore the ways in which Christianity can make a positive contribution to the religious situation of the world today.

1. The Traditional Christian Message

Christians did not start out with a written book, one Gospel, like the Qur'an of Muslims and the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs. Christ's Gospel was orally transmitted by the Apostles,

and only slowly decades later was the message committed to writing and then the one Gospel got four versions. Since the first audiences were mostly Jews and Christianity was first a reform movement within Judaism, the main points of the Good News responded to the expectations of Judaism.

The culmination of divine revelation in Jesus of Nazareth, the definitive accomplishment of human salvation in his death and resurrection, and the new order established in him were the central points of Christian proclamation. But these were specifically directed to the Jewish religious context: To the Jews who were looking forward to a Messiah, a new Moses who would liberate them from their slavery to Rome, Christians said: In Jesus of Nazareth we have received the final and definitive revelation and "sacrament" of God's universal love, fulfilment of His promise made to our fore-fathers. To the Jews who accepted so many intermediary events in God's action in the world such as creation of the world from the primeval chaos, the freeing of Israel from Egypt and their liberation from the captivity of Babylon, Christians declared that this progressive evolution of human redemption reaches its definitive fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Resurrection is an event that goes beyond the bounds of history and anticipates its end. It has the character of a final and definitive revelation, signifying and anticipating the eschaton, our absolute future in God, which is still to be fully realized.

In this main thrust of Christianity which is in direct dialogue with Judaism, the other world religions have only a marginal relevance. They are a "searching anticipation" of Christ and a kind of "participation" in his unique mediation. Of course, the particular historical and cultural forms in which Jesus' relation to the Father were realized should not be absolutized, nor should Christ's earthly existence attributed any universality and finality which belong to the transcendental reality. Besides, the Christ of church's faith is not restricted to the known historical Jesus, but could take on the expectations and hopes of other religions as well. What the Church has to share with the world as permanently valid and indispensable is the liberating memory of Jesus Christ and the joyous communion of service that it inspires. Since the church is confident that the insight and the transforming power of its message is indispensable, it should not have

any defensive fear of admitting that it can also receive from other religions other aspects of God's total "Word", to be learned from the achievements of genuine grace-filled conversion in other contexts and cultures.

The emphasis on what happened in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection seemed to be too anthropomorphic a conception to the sophisticated minds outside Judaism, an absolutization of the temporal and transitory. It was inadvisable to the personalist perspective of the Jews who saw in every event an expression of the will of Yahweh, most especially in the decisive events of history. That was the framework in which the first preachers of the Gospel announced the Christian message to their audience.

But the later New Testament writings such as the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians and the Johannine writings showed that the Hebrew anthropomorphic framework was not necessary for the Christian message. Without in any way losing sight of the personalist framework of divine self-disclosure in history, they shifted the stress from what happened in Christ to the person of Christ. The radical difference between the genuine Pauline epistles and the later ones like those to the Colossians and Ephesians is in the christology. For these later writings that took the Greek sensibility seriously into account, Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:12), the one in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created (Col. 1:16, the one in whom the fullness dwells (Col. 1:19, 1 Jn 3:13); similar themes which have some parallels in other epistles, are developed throughout these later epistles. But other statements which have no parallels in other letters include: Christ is the mystery of God (Col. 1:17; 2:2-3), Christ forgives sins (Col. 1:13-14, 3:13, 1 Jn 1:7), and Christ is victorious over principalities and powers (Col. 2:15). Johannine writings clearly show the definitive shift to the person of Christ.

Arland J. Hultgren discerns in the New Testament writings four types of redemptive christology. Paul and Mark present redemption as accomplished by Christ. This is the least problematic since it proclaims Christ as the center of human redemption. Gospels of Matthew and Luke and the Acts of the Apostles speak of redemption as being continued through Christ, while

the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Peter, Hebrews and Revelation declare redemption as *won by Christ*. Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles stress *the mediation of Christ* in the work of redemption. According to Hultgren the reason for this difference may be that in the last three forms of conception we find a third generation of Christianity. Seeing that an accounting of the gospel of redemption was not needed, those communities of faith engaged in advanced reflection in the service of the wider community.¹

That this shift from the human psychology of Christ to his person is not anything contrary to the Gospel is clear from the religious context surrounding the New Testament writings. For example, Paul's talk at the Areopagus to the Athenians quoting from Greek philosophers shows that preaching Christ is preaching the Unknown God, whom Athenians already worshipped. The fellowship offered us in the risen Christ is a continuation and fulfilment of the contact we already have with the Godhead "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts. 17:22-31). Even the Synoptics have what is called a meteorite from the Johannine skies: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (Mtt. 11:27 and Lk 10:22). The shift to the Greek cultural context helped Christians to transcend the anthropomorphism of the Palestinian agricultural situation. Even in spirituality, the transcendental framework of Plato, the Stoics and especially Plotinus replaced the devotionism of the Bible. Instead of merely fulfilling God's commands as obedient creatures, the Greek scheme appeared more in tune with the invitation extended by Jesus Christ to all human beings to become adopted children of the Father in heaven: Through religious praxis one has to purify oneself, enter into one's own interior and feel the divine presence there, be led by the Spirit, the World Soul, to contemplate the eternal Word and finally be united with the one Father!

There were a good many radical shifts in the hermeneusis of Christianity. Even in the understanding of the reality of Christ himself, some think that it is difficult to find a "central thread of christological formulation that represents the basic consensus" of

1 Arland J. Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits, Christology and Redemption in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Christian believers. The question, however, is: can such a consensus be formulated, a consensus that is faithful to the concrete catholicity of people's understandings and experiences and worship? Or is Christian belief itself an historically unfolding reality whose multiplicities are intrinsic to tradition?"² The reason for this discontinuity is as Christ says in Lk 10:21: man's understanding is so overwhelmed that he cannot penetrate the mysteries of God. But the next verse of Luke shows also the chain of continuity, namely, the person of Christ through whom alone one can approach the Father. Jaroslav Pelikan states: "It took centuries of speculation and controversy by some of the most 'wise and understanding' minds in the history of thought to probe the implications of that declaration. The outcome was a metaphysical tradition that, from Augustine to Hegel, interpreted the Trinity as the most profound of all the mysteries of being"³.

One of the dramatic and lasting changes in Christian religious speculation occurred in the Middle Ages while reflecting on the "wisdom of the Cross". Even though from the triumph of Constantine under the symbol of the cross, the cross had ceased to be an instrument of torture, in Christian piety it continued to symbolize Christ's humility, obedience and patient suffering to be imitated by all Christians. But for more sophisticated thinkers like Boethius and Peter Abelard the cross also symbolized that evil could not negate the sovereignty of God and divine providence. For Abelard the fundamental meaning of the wisdom of the cross was this: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). But many found this explanation also rather inadequate. So St. Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man), wanted to find an explanation of the wisdom of the cross *remoto Christo*, that means a solution by reason alone. So he took as the basis of his reasoning the consistency of God and of the universe, which God did not violate arbitrarily since such violation would undermine the moral order of the universe itself, which is rectitude or rightness. So the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God was to render satisfaction for the dishonour done to God through human sin

2 Bernard Cooke, Review of the *The Word of Life* by Thomas C. Ogden *Theology Today*, 47 (1990) p. 218.

3 *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 5.

Further, only one equal to God could render adequate satisfaction to God. This line of reasoning of Anselm, which implied a good many fallacies and brought down the divine justice to very human dimensions, reinterpreted the Christian message of the ten preceding centuries and shaped both Catholic and Protestant theological thinking after him till very recent times. Looking for clear and distinct ideas as the ideal of human knowledge, and holding mathematics, logic and the empirical sciences as models, Scholasticism reduced divine revelation itself to a formal communication of a certain number of "truths". Those same truths were to be interpreted and understood in terms of Aristotelian rationality!

Aftermath of Modernity. A radical split between faith and life was the consequence of an overemphasis of empirical sciences over the traditional hegemony of philosophy and theology. As many like Hegel noted, "the dichotomy between faith and life was only a form of the alienation characteristic of the whole modern era"⁴. The stress on the human subject reduced the external world into a mere object to be dominated through science and technology and religion withdrew more and more into the individual, ending up as an empty subjective longing for the infinite. It was a crisis of meaning for modern society and in it the Church itself faced a crisis of identity. With the progress of printing and easy availability of religious texts the monks lost their theological monopoly. Liberal Protestants like Reimarus, Renan and Harnack asserted the impossibility of historically going beyond a human Jesus to a Christ of faith. In reaction to this, while conservative Protestantism took refuge in the absolute character of the word of the Bible, Catholic ecclesiastical authority absolutized its pronouncements as the living prophetic word to be accepted in obedient faith.

II. Religion in a Post-Scientific Age

Modern science offered the language of facts dealing with the "really" true, and relegated religion to a second rate status of dealing with human feelings and emotions. What theologians like Rahner, Lonergan and others at the end of the scientific period attempted to do was to create a third language of theology by a

4 Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trs. V. Green, New York: Paulist Press, 1977, p. 16.

sort of synthesis between the above two. But today the situation has radically changed. As Frederic B. Burnham states: "Revelations in twentieth century physics have totally undermined the epistemological pride of Victorian science and brought the modern era to a close. In the postmodern world of quantum phenomena, the foundation of reality itself is elusive and indeterminate. Scientific propositions about the essence of matter are at best enlightened approximations"⁵.

It is generally agreed that science is not exactly dealing with "real" facts, but only "research traditions". So there is an epistemological relativism with a plurality of tongues claiming human allegiance, science one of them, and Bible another equally valid. As James B. Miller puts it: "The prevailing images for the pre-modern world were organic. Those for the modern world were mechanical and dualistic. The characteristic images for the post-modern world are historical, relational and personal"⁶.

In this new climate many are proposing a new approach to theology, a fourth language. George Lindbeck, professor of historical theology at the Yale University in his ground-breaking book, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, proposes a cultural-linguistic approach to religion: The attempt of well-meaning theologians to translate the language of the Bible into the secular idiom, can only empty religion of its content. According to Lindbeck all human experience is shaped, molded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms. "The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth-claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action"⁷. The ancient use of the phrase *regula fidei* about dogmatic formulations suggests that a regulative approach may be best in ecumenical discussions, since "rules, unlike propositions or expressive symbols, retain an invariant meaning under changing conditions of compatibility and conflict". This presents the possibility of reconciliation among differing doctrinal positions without capitulation.

5 *Post Modern Theology* ed. Frederick B. Burnham, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989 Introd. p. 10.

6 James B. Miller, "The Emerging Post Modern World", *Post Modern Theology*

7 George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954, p. 18.

Thus the grammar of Catholic dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation is constituted by three principles or rules, the monotheistic principle, the principle of historical specificity about Jesus Christ as a human being who lived at a specific time and place, and the principle of Christological maximalism that ascribes to Jesus every possible importance not inconsistent with the first two principles. Everything else follows from these principles. These basic rules are not theoretically argued out but discovered as fundamental to the stability of the believing community.

The main complaint against Lindbeck's "grammar of faith" is that it is too parochial. It tries to explain a religion as a sort of closed system with no transcendence whatever. It is not concerned about the faith of other men, especially Eastern religions. It is very much inward-oriented seeking to recover the Biblical narrative within the church. What Lindbeck has explicated through his so called new theory only shows what Western theology has been for a long time, a closed colonial culture to be imposed on the world. There are good many critics and respondents to the views expressed by Lindbeck. One has to go beyond the parochialism of Lindbeck and retrieve the language of citizenship, to become multilingual and therefore genuinely pluralistic and speak also the language of other religions⁸.

We cannot simply write off the achievement of sciences: "The world is not so much a creation as a creating. And human beings are both a product of and, for now, participants in this ongoing creating... Existence is fully relative; that is, nothing exists in and for itself. To be is to be related... With Einstein's developments of relativity physics, common-sense notions of the absoluteness of space and time have been abandoned... With the advent of quantum theory, the common sense notion of a substantial universe in any sense has become highly suspect"⁹. Quantum physics has effectively got rid of the traditional subject-object dichotomy and shown that "there are no 'facts' in nature independent of some particular observer. All knowers are participants in that which is to be known". In the post-modern

8 "Christian Faithfulness in a Pluralistic World", *Post-modern Theology* pp. 74-91

9 James B. Miller, "The Emerging Post-Modern World", *Post-modern Theology*, p.9.

context all knowledge is a cultural artifact, and contextual understanding of language excludes all positivism which had assumed that language could have absolute and non-contextual meaning. In fact human knowledge is argued to be an ecological process parallel to the biological.

In this new post-modern perspective Christian community has to rethink the basic points of its faith: For example Creation is not a matter of the past. "God has been creating the world as far back as we can know and is creating the world yet today... and every element of the world participates not only in its own creation but in the creation of the universe as a whole"¹⁰. The emergence of human beings is only a part of the process of everything else: mineral, animal and vegetable, and in view of the likelihood that there will be no human beings hundred thousand years hence, man's existence is just a blink in the history of the universe. "The Fall" itself cannot be spoken of as a historical event. We need other stories to explain sin. The universe does not *have*, but *is* history.

In this perspective the question arises how relevant the language of the Bible is today. First of all the true message of the Bible has to be explored through proper scholarship. Secondly the message itself has to be reinterpreted in view of modern problems in the style of contemporary political theologies. Even here feminist theologians have serious problems with the Bible. Elizabeth Cady Stanton an early feminist interpreter of the Bible tried to excise texts oppressive of women. Rosemary Radford Ruether appeals to a "canon within the canon". Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses a sophisticated form of historical criticism to reconstruct the experience of the early Christian community restoring the very omissions and reversing the negativities to give back to women their place in history. Many like Sandra M. Schneiders doubt whether we can ever get out of the patriarchal straight jacket of Biblical thought. Systemic embodiments of patriarchy has been questioned in successive stages during the modern period: The divine right of kings was shattered by the French Revolution and Protestantism called into question the role of the papacy. Divine sanction of slavery and white supremacy was challenged by the

¹⁰ *Ibid* pp. 14-15.

civil rights movements and fights against all varieties of colonialism and classism. Still the age of discrimination and of the domination of the rich over the poor still continues.

Predominance of dogma and its imposition through penal sanctions continue to be another remnant of patriarchy. "The objects of Catholic faith — which are called dogmas — necessarily are and always have been the unalterable norm both for faith and for theological science", said the 1973 "Declaration in Defence of the Catholic Doctrine" issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The traditional theological notes (*de fide definita, certa, probabilis, de fide catholica* etc.) held that a dogmatic definition from a council or pope was the supreme criterion for certainty or security in faith. This Catholic insistence on dogmas has been seriously criticized in recent times on various counts: It is substituting the political authority and control of ecclesiastical government for the supreme place in faith of divine Revelation. In the past it has outrageously infringed upon human and Christian freedom, torturing people and even killing them in the name of orthodoxy. This denial of human freedom continues even today: "Where once an anathema could lead to imprisonment and death, today it can bring exclusion from Church membership. Economic sanctions, social penalties and charges of self-indulgent trendiness have replaced burning at the stake"¹¹. Prescribed formulations seem to rule out personal faith, if one is supposed to simply internalize what is externally imposed. Surely one has to go beyond the formulations to their object, namely the person of Jesus Christ (Aquinas: *Summa*, 2a 2ae q. 1, a.2 ad 2). Indeed, as Karl Rahner states: "The dogmatic statement leads towards the historical event of salvation, in spite of all its conceptual reflection... It does not merely speak 'about' this event but tries to bring man into a real relationship with it"¹².

Over against the exaggerated pretensions of the ecclesiastical magisterium in the past, today all realize that dogma has several intrinsic limitations: The ultimate norm of faith is only God who reveals himself in Christ and hence to give ultimate and unconditional assent to dogmas would be idolatrous. The New Testament forms an essential part of the basic response to

11 Gerald O'Collins' *The Case Against Dogma*, NY: Paulist Press, 1983 p. 11.

12 *Theological Investigations*, p. 51.

the Christ event. The opinion of the post-Tridentine theologians who held that tradition contained certain revealed truths not found in Scripture is not seriously entertained today. Hence one has to judge dogmas in the light of the New Testament and not the other way round. Every dogmatic formulation is historically conditioned since, as A. N. Whitehead observed in his *Adventures of Ideas*, "Wherever there is a creed, there is a heretic around the corner or in his grave". Only against the positions of those who taught otherwise can the dogmatic pronouncements of the magisterium be properly understood. Such pronouncements do not even pretend to give a complete explanation of the doctrine involved nor touch all aspects of faith. Besides, all dogmas are not of equal value. In fact some formally undefined points of doctrine may be more central to Christian faith than those defined by the church with great publicity at a particular moment in history. The unfinished character of dogmatic definitions serves only to emphasize the enduring incomprehensibility of the divine mystery. Language cannot exhaustively define any aspect of divine activity in human salvation. Dogma was principally used to save unity in a situation of confusion, and terms artificially coined on such occasions like *homoousios* and *transubstantiation* should not be taken for God's words. Faith itself should not be misrepresented as mere confession of some isolated statements. Human language itself keeps changing and, as time goes on, words even of the Bible take on new meanings. So the message of the Gospel needs new expression in the world of concrete experience. This means dogmatic formulations cannot be absolutized.

On the other hand, opposition to dogma can go to the opposite extreme of insisting exclusively on private, concrete individual experience as the essence of religion. The reason alleged is the danger of distorting the Gospel message by alien rationalism, of moving in the direction of abstraction and detaching believers from the concrete event of revelation¹³. Still abstraction and universalization are necessary conditions of human knowledge. Certitude and accuracy are its two poles. Attention to concrete details brings accuracy; but for greater certitude one has to refer the concrete to the universal: The more universal a statement, the closer it is to the fundamental principles and basic conditions

13 O'Collins, *I. c.* p. 61

of human thinking. Besides, to be professed and proclaimed by a community of persons existing through the centuries the message has to be lifted from the concrete situations of its original formulation and raised to a level of universality. This universalization of the Christ-event and the Christ's message for a community that grew out of the narrow confines of Palestinian Judaism and spread all over the world, was the primary positive function of dogmas, which has relevance even today. In this work of universalization, Greek philosophy and Platonic and Gnostic spirituality played an important role and hence dogmas need demythologisation today.

III. Transcendence in the Post-Modern World

In this post-modern world which is basically historical, relational and personal, Aristotelian metaphysics may not be the best tool for the universalization of the Gospel message. Today anthropological, economic, sociological and psychological paradigms have greater relevance for making the message of salvation intelligible and expressible.

In the postmodern era the basic pillars of modernity such as the assumption of the self-contained and self-sufficient character of our universe, supremacy of human reason, and an optimistic expectation of inevitable progress have broken down. Even to ask the question why this universe rather than another, one has to go outside our universe, which is not possible, and posit other universes. Human reason cannot by itself find answers to all its pressing problems, and knowledge itself does not appear to be inherently good. Still one can find signs of an opening out to an order of things beyond the particularity of our experience. Diogenes Allen finds such 'traces of God' or signs of transcendence in accepting with humility unjust torture and even execution as exemplified in the radio dramas of Friedrich Durrenmatt and Julia de Beausobre's idea of "creative suffering" in her positive approach to her interrogators. Even in suffering at the hands of nature, when the gracious presence of God is not actually felt, one can find an exit from this constricting world in the example of Jesus Christ, the crucified Son of God¹⁴. But the most central fact of the post-modern experience is the indefeasible value of every human being.

14 Diogenes Allen, *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World*, Cowley Publications, 1981.

This is best exemplified in the Good Samaritan of the Gospels. It is the uniqueness of the man's personality that made the actions of the Samaritan not merely an act of mercy but of justice¹⁵. The rich man was condemned to eternal fire not because he did any injustice to the poor Lazarus at his door, but because he failed to take note of him and his plight. As *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* states it, Morality is the god who makes the weak prevail against even the stronger.

The contemporary world's move towards transcendence is a slow and tortuous one. Since a conceptual flight to mere being, truth, goodness and the like is not in tune with the present mood of the people, one has to work on the element of solidity immanent in the fluidity of human experience. This is best exemplified in the procedure of recent American philosophers like William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Most of them started on their philosophical inquiry as faithful followers of Hegelian idealism, but later finding the incongruity of the Hegelian world of abstract ideas with the extremely pragmatic approach of American thinking, rejected it altogether. Still all of them appeared to be striving all their lives, each in his own way, to bring in through the back door the metaphysical transcendence they had thrown out through the front door. James tried it through his analysis of human psychology, Dewey by his "creative experience", and Mead in terms of the dynamics of social psychology. The same arduous pilgrimage to transcendence, in a way the effort to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps, is seen in contemporary thinking.

According to Thomas F. Torrance, in reaction to "the imperialism of mechanistic concepts emanating from a dogmatic scientism and a dogmatic empiricism, end-products of the Newtonian era of science", "some biblical scholars and theologians have allowed themselves to be driven into existentialism and phenomenology where they have been caught in the flight from scientific objectivity", and foundered in the morass of historical relativism. Others took refuge in cultural expressionism and sociology and got stranded in the immense gap between modern culture and historical Christianity¹⁶. The greatest drawback of the

15 Diogenes Allen, "Christian Values in a Post-Christian Context", *Post-modern Theology*, pp. 20-36.

16 Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, London: Oxford, 1971, p.3.

previous age was the obsolete notion of science as a detached, disinterested instrumentalist and mechanistic form of knowledge. As Torrance says quoting M. Polanyi, "our psychology insists that detachment is not the sign of rationality, but of open-mouthed imbecility"¹⁷. The ability to think is the ability to connect things up with other things and discover their interrelationships. In the actual states, from which any science starts concepts are not found in isolation, but "are interlinked in a field of conceptuality which is coordinated with a continuous flow of orderly, intelligible happening in space and time"¹⁸. In fact the complex ontological structure of objects out there combining in them universal nature and concrete individuality, and qualities apprehended by the senses and the essence perceived only by reason, in some way corresponds to our inner world, which is also structured. Our mental framework puts together sense experience, imagination, thinking, reasoning and willing. In fact, contemporary science which made us aware of the "depth" of things, has forced us to question both the adequacy of simple causal relationships and their application to all human experience.

IV. A Hermeneutics beyond Exclusivism and Inclusivism

The ethos arises from mythos rather than the other way round. The great failure of Western theological thinking in the Middle Ages and after, was reducing the divine revelation into 'truths' and dogmas. In reaction to it there emerged the naturalism of the Enlightenment. To get out of this dilemma of traditional dualism of experience and truth on the one hand, and rationalistic naturalism on the other, we need, as Jerry H. Hill suggests, a sort of mediated transcendence combining the strengths of both. What is needed is a hierarchy of interpenetrating dimensions of the noetic, the moral and the linguistic. Transcendence is more than these, but not other than or apart from them. Even in the Bible one has to listen to the five voices of a text, its plot, the different characters, the cultural repertoire, problems and solutions in the narrative world, and the symbolic implications in antithesis between different positions¹⁹.

17 *Ibid* p. 8

18. *Ibid* pp. 16-17

19 Jerry H. Gill, *Meditated Transcendence, A Postmodern Reflection*, Macor Georgia; Mercer University Press, 1989.

What has to be overcome in this postmodern mentality is a kind of cynicism about the power or even the relevance of rational argument regarding fundamental questions of life and morality. Fideism is an escape from the obligation to give reason for one's hope to those who question, as St. Peter has enjoined in his epistle. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, "What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover is, a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of the same tradition"²⁰.

Opposed to fideism is relativism which arises when people insist that rational evaluation of conflicting traditions is possible only if one stands outside these traditions in a way bracketing one's own commitment to a tradition. But in the history of Christian theology the great achievement of Thomas Aquinas was that he harmonized an Aristotelian structure of thought with an Augustinian psychology. Rationality is not tradition-free. A style of thinking is established in a community when certain texts and voices are considered authoritative, and procedures for enquiry are established. That is how rationality develops. Challenges to a particular line of reasoning arise when different and incompatible interpretations to the same texts are presented, incoherences and inadequacies are exposed and the tradition is made to confront other systems of thought. Such healthy challenges give rise to imaginative conceptual innovation and new beliefs are added to the tradition. But such new ideas, in order that they may be accepted and integrated, have to maintain continuity with the old ideas and should be judged through them, though eventually the new ones may even replace the old. Transcultural enquiry holds both commitment and rationality together. For, a person is in a tradition and should be committed to that tradition. There is no neutral vantage point outside all traditions. Rationality needs dialogue, and this means in order to be fully at home with one's language one has to learn another language

and be in constant dialogue with it and be open to new ideas²¹.

A Convergent Christology: This dialogical and rational approach to faith is particularly apparent today in the Christian proclamation of Christ to the world. Some go back to the methodology of the apologetes of the 2nd century. Encountering the Stoic conception of the *logoi spermatikoi* everywhere and in all things they presented Christ in a cosmological perspective: the fullness of the logos is found in Christ. This approach is revived by Teilhard de Chardin. In his evolutionary world view, starting with the explosion in the heart of the universe billions of years ago, cosmogenesis and homogenesis find their fulfilment in Christogenesis, the emergence of God's Word as Jesus of Nazareth. Others like Karl Rahner find the focus of dialogue in anthropology. W. Pannenberg and others find the point of Christological convergence in a renewed and revised perception of history.

An inherent danger of such general patterns in which Christ is packaged for the world is reductionism. Jesus Christ is set in a predetermined scheme of reference, and faith is reduced to a mere philosophy or ideology. What is important even in a dialogical approach among traditions is that each tradition should have something specific to say and contribute to the religious heritage of humanity. The special point of Christian proclamation of the Good News is the person of Jesus Christ and his relevance for the world of today. Without reference to Jesus of history, Christ of faith would be a mere myth or abstract ideal. As good many theologians like E. Kasemann, E. Fuchs, G. Bornkamm, H. Conzelmann and Hans Küng have pointed out, the christological formulas of belief intend nothing other than the expression of the being and significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and their practical criterion is Jesus himself. Hence theology itself is a narrative of what actually took place in Jesus Christ and how it affects the whole humanity.

Theology as Celebration of Faith: Here theology is not merely believing in order to understand, as Augustine put it, nor even faith seeking intelligibility as Anselm did. After all the object of faith is God alone, and He is incomprehensible to human intelligence. Faith grasps the presence of God in theophanies, myths,

21 "Faith and Reason: Reflections on MacIntyre's Tradition Constituted Enquiry", *Religious Studies*, 27(1991) 259-67.

and sacred stories. He is discovered particularly in historical events surpassing human possibilities, designated as miracles; they indicate a personal presence and special intervention of God going beyond the natural course of things. All these are not proofs in the strict sense of the term for the existence and activity of God, since they are discerned as such only by true believers. For them these serve as external expressions of their faith. The incarnation of Christ is a particular event of history, which in itself does not have an absolute value: The humanity of Christ is finite and created and does not exhaust the infinite possibilities of the divinity. But as the event of the entry of the Son of God into created universe it is unique and has an inimitable value for the whole creation. Hence for the believer in God this unique event and its acceptance becomes the greatest Good News, the most meaningful celebration of his faith. Reflection on Jesus is christological because it affirms that in the historical Jesus of Nazareth we have the revelation of the Only begotten of God. A true christology is oriented to a quite specific history and a unique life and destiny. It is derivable neither from human nor social needs, neither anthropologically nor sociologically. It has to preserve a real and actual unique memory, narrate a real and actual story, stating clearly who Jesus was, what he wanted and what his mission and message²².

If Christology is to be relevant and responsible it has to be considered and represented in the light of human questions and needs and in accord with the problems of the age and of the people to which it is addressed. This is why in the New Testament itself we meet with not one but several christologies. They represented the different ways Christ was conceived on the basis of the concrete life and reality of the different communities. Even given the dogmatic christology formulated by living magisterium to exclude the erroneous conceptions and heretical preoccupations dictated by the politics of the day, the living Christian communities are not excused from the task of contemplating and thinking about Christ in terms of their own situations, following the example of the local churches of the early christianity. In the Gospels Jesus did not preach about himself but rather only about

22 *Jesus Christ*, London: Burns & Oats, & New York: Paulist Press, 1977 pp. 20-24.

the Kingdom of God, and even after the resurrection the risen Lord maintains his relation to the Father whose rule is not yet fully established (1 Cor. 15:28). Hence the historical reality of Christ and his work has to be continued into the present history. Often the exclusive emphasis on the past dogmatic statements about Christ only hides the hidden agenda of those whose principal concern is to maintain the status quo that gives them economic and political power. In order to experience the true meaning of christology one has to lead a life in accordance with the Spirit of Jesus. One can even say Jesus is Christ only by the Spirit²³.

In the approach to other religions in proclaiming Christ, the general mistake is the attempt to restrict Christ to the limitations of the Christian Church. The Church is a social organism which grew and developed its definite physiognomy in the course of centuries. It is clear that apart from the mission given to the disciples to proclaim the Gospel and to call together a new humanity, Christ did not establish the church in any definite details. Hence to restrict the incarnate Word of God within the limits of a social institution that evolved according to the sociological and political laws can do a sort of violence to the mystery of the incarnation itself. One may legitimately claim that such sociological and political growth of the church is within the divine providence of achieving human salvation in and through the dynamics of the human reality. But this should be taken in the positive sense, and not in the sense that God is tying His own hands through the limitations of His instruments.

But such a negative perception as makes Christ the exclusive possession of the Christian church is implied in the positions of both the exclusivists and the inclusivists who explain the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity: Exclusivists hold that salvation for all human beings is through Christ and that too by belonging in some manner to the church he founded. Inclusivists affirm that Christ is definitive and normative for the salvation of all, and also that he is in some way available also to the followers of other religions. According to the famous formula of Karl Rahner followers of other religions are anonymous Christians, while the members of the church are Christians with the real title. Raimundo

23 Jan Sobrino S. J., *Christology at the Crossroads, A Latin American Approach*, trs. John Drury, Maryknoll: Orbis Bks, 1978, pp. 20-22.

Panikkar proposed that Christ is also in Hinduism, but hidden and unknown. The central thrust of all New Testament writings is that in the Christ-event, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the salvation of all humanity has been definitively achieved. There is no difficulty in explaining the universality and normativeness of Christ by relegating everything to the Divine Logos, whose one expression is Jesus of Nazareth, with the possibility of any number of other expressions in other religious figures like Buddha, Krishna and even Confucius and Socrates: Jacques Dupuis, S.J. in his recent book *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* summarises this position quite typically and clearly: "Theologies of a Christ present but 'hidden' and 'unknown' in the world's religious traditions, of an 'anonymous Christianity', along with still other theologies, strive to reconcile the traditional Christian position regarding Jesus with the reality of various manifestations. *Christ as mystery is God turning toward men and women in self-manifestation and self-revelation. The Christic mystery, therefore, is present wherever God enters into the life of human beings in an experience of the divine presence*"²⁴.

But the central point of the mystery of the incarnation is not the eternal and changeless Logos, but what happened in Jesus of Nazareth. Incarnation itself is not a change in God but an "event" focussed in the humanity of Christ. That is what is definitive and has universal importance. New Testament itself gives us two explanations for that definitiveness: In the Pauline writings, the birth, death and resurrection of Christ "according to the Scriptures" show the will of the Father to "restore all things under a new head, Christ". The Johannine theology, on the other hand, places the reason for the definitiveness and universality of the incarnation in the personality of the Son, in whom all attain adoptive sonship. But the problem with both inclusivists and exclusivists is their implied confusion between Christ as the one source of salvation for all humanity and the place and role of the Church in the gradual and time-bound process of making that salvation accessible to all. They ascribe a privileged position to Christians with regard to Christ. As Dupuis himself states: "This mystery remains anonymous in a certain sense for whoever has not been enabled, thanks to the Christian revelation, to recognize

24 Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, trs. Robert R. Barr, Maryknoll: Orbis Bks, 1991, p. 92, Italics min.[®]

it in the human condition of Jesus of Nazareth. All have the experience of the Christic mystery, but Christians alone are in a position to give it its name". The point here is that one can normally reach Jesus Christ and the redemption he achieved only through the Church he founded, the Sacraments he instituted, the canon of books collected together and recognized as the New Testament, and the one Tradition of the Church produced by its historical evolution in different particular churches. But the important question is what the relation is of these ecclesial elements to Christ himself and to the whole economy of salvation. If these are perceived also as the "means", only through which the salvific reality of Christ can have access to human beings, there is no doubt then that "Christians" have a sort of monopoly over Christ.

Here we fail to see the wood for the trees: Concentrating on the particular paths and the arduous journey towards the fountain we forget the plentiful water of life that is already there open for all. Blinded by the limitations of the Church, her tradition, her sacraments and other means we fail to recognize that the economy of human salvation has already been accomplished with the death and glorification of Christ. If Christ has risen from the dead all human beings have risen with him. Through resurrection the concrete and time-space bound human nature of Christ is freed from its limitations. Instead of the spirit conforming itself to the conditions of matter, the spiritual soul of Christ draws to its condition his risen body, and Christ is a spiritual entity. "Proclaimed the Son of God through resurrection" the risen Christ is present in every human heart along with the Holy Spirit, as the one source of life and salvation available to all. After all, the Church is only the herald of human salvation, not its author. Its task is to bear effective witness to the saving activity of Christ who gives his own Spirit to his fellow human beings.

Hence the primary question is not how Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists can be made to know Christ and persuaded to accept him, and how we can package him in ways acceptable to each religious tradition and school of philosophy. This is a question that has been given exaggerated importance by the Western imperialist tradition right from the conversion of emperor Constantine down through the centuries of colonialism to our own times; religion unwittingly became the handmaid of politics. This was further aggravated by individualism that became the

hallmark of Western thought from the Renaissance and the Protestant Revolution through the industrial age and the whole Modern and post-Modern periods. The sense of the unity of humanity as the family of God's children was lost sight of and the churches appeared like spiritual supermarkets, where individuals could pick and choose according to their private preferences. The first and basic question is what the meaning of Christ is for all human beings. In Jesus of Nazareth something happened that altered human history for all humans whether they know it or not. If the incarnation is the entry of the Son of God into human history he is the Lord of history and his central role in that history is a fact which affects the lives of all.

This is true in a certain sense of all historical events which in one way or another affect all subsequent human history. Christ's death and resurrection was decisive for all humanity. One should say that in an analogous manner the life and death of Socrates was decisive since it made Plato propose an integral philosophy that became a central inspiration for the whole Western culture; that the illumination of Buddha under the bodhi tree set the wheel of dharma in movement for the whole human race, that the hijra of Mohammed was decisive since it gave origin to the Islamic movement in history. Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus Christ and Mohammed are not isolated figures, nor are the religious traditions which they inspired parallel economies of human salvation. They are integral parts of the one economy of salvation, and the decisive contribution each one of them made should be recognized as such. Yet each one of them is unique and different and has a different meaning for humanity. If Socrates and Plato gave birth to distinct philosophical traditions, Confucius gave definite expression to the cultural tradition of a nation. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are religions, but not in the same sense of the term. The question, therefore, is not which of them is right and which wrong, but rather what specific contribution each one of them makes towards the realization of the ultimate concerns of human beings.

Religions and the Concept of Salvation: One of the confusing concepts in religious hermeneutics is that of salvation. Wilfred Cantwell Smith says: "The traditional Christian term 'salvation' is certainly not generic and while some Christians will

continue to use it... others internally have come to find it problematic; not to say, especially among youth in the West, vacuous"²⁵. The word has lost its meaning and content, which needs to be recovered if religion itself has to make sense. This content itself is somewhat different for different religions and hence explains to a great extent the radical diversity and also complementarity of religions. For the Jews who shared the ancient myths of the Middle East, creation was the establishment of order over the primeval chaos. The perfect order of things was a covenant between the Creator and man. God's act of creating man as a partner of that benevolent treaty, was also the first instalment from his side towards the fulfilment of the covenant. Sin was, therefore, pride, rebellion, disobedience, fratricide and subsequent alienation of nature from man. Its opposite, salvation, came to be conceived as liberation from slavery, obedience to the covenant with God, and subjection of all things to man, and subsequent material affluence.

For the Indian religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the present abnormal condition of man consisted in bondage to ignorance and suffering and lack of knowledge of one's authentic self. Salvation, therefore, was liberation from such bondage and realization of one's authentic self. This authentic self itself was differently conceived: According to Jainism it was growth of personality, pulling down all the barriers to knowledge and power and reaching boundless consciousness. To Buddhism it was impossible to conceive the authentic in terms of the present inauthentic experience, and hence liberation could be thought of only as nirvana, a blowing out of the present structured condition of suffering. Hindu tradition identified the authentic state with that of the One-without-a-second, designated both as Atman and Brahman. Hence liberation was realization of one's identity with the divine self, the true Self of one's own self.

Various speculations on good and evil, justice and injustice brought into the picture of human salvation ideas about placating a God offended by human sin, as well as about the need for human redemption from the bondage of evil. But the mainline Greek philosophical inquiry into the absolute One, showed that human

25 *Towards a World Theology, Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981, p. 182.

self-fulfilment could only be a sharing in the one supreme Good, which by its very nature is diffusive of itself, like the Sun constantly emitting its rays. This reflection initiated by Parmenides, Socrates and Plato reached its climax in the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. It was adopted into Christian spirituality by early Christian thinkers like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and especially the unknown writer who went under the pseudonym Dionysius and had a great influence down the centuries. Experiencing the beauty of material things one has to withdraw into one's own interior to see the beauty of the soul, from there ascend to an experience of the Spirit, contemplate the divine Logos and finally unite oneself with the one Father, the one origin without origin. This in a way synthesized the Hebrew idea of encounter and fellowship with a personal God with the Indo-Greek perspective of achieving realization of the divine ground and source of one's being. What is important today is to recognize the actual convergence in human consciousness of these different disparate ideas about human salvation. In fact for all believers the end and goal of life is not a mere escape from the sufferings of this world, nor mere enjoyment of material pleasures, but rather entrance into the immutable joy of divine fellowship.

Religions and Worship: A final and decisive area of diversity among religions is that of worship. Most religions have distinctive worship systems to which only the members can be admitted for active participation. Thus only the baptized Christians can take part fruitfully in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the performance of which is reserved to validly ordained ministers. In the Hindu tradition also the rules of worship have been elaborated in detail and if the regulations are not properly observed the cult itself can be harmful than beneficial. But here again there is a certain convergence of cultic concerns, and what each religion specifically contributes to the understanding of religious worship is more important than mechanical rituals and rubrics.

Thus Christianity did not start with a distinct liturgy of its own. The early Christians continued to follow the Judaic ritual, to which they gave a new meaning focussed on the Risen Christ, especially a celebration of his death and resurrection and its specific importance for the salvation of humanity. The one bread broken for many and the one chalice shared were the mysteries of

the Body and Blood of Christ offered up as a sacrifice on Calvary and continued as a sacrificial banquet. It took four centuries for special Christian liturgies to evolve, and the formulation of a specific Christian theology of Sacrifice and Sacraments was mostly the work of the speculative genius of St. Augustine in the fifth century. Augustine refers the need of worship to human nature itself: "Men cannot be gathered together in the name of religion, whether it be true or false, unless they are joined together by some sign or fellowship of visible sacraments" (*Contr. Faust* 19, 11; PL 42, 355). For him "true sacrifice is every work which is done in order to establish sacred fellowship with God" (*City of God* 10,6 PL 41, 282). Similarly in the opinion of Hugo of St. Victor in the 12th century the works of nature and the work of salvation in Jesus Christ are expressions of the same wisdom of God, and from the beginning there were Christians "in fact though not in name". The common basis of salvation is faith and grace which no external means like sacraments can substitute (see PL 175, 11; 176, 677-690). Isaac of Ninive, a great Syrian ascetic who resigned his bishopric within six months of his appointment and spent his whole life in contemplation explains that the Liturgy of the altar should represent the liturgy of the heart, which should be also the continuation of the altar. In Hinduism too, as the Santiparvam of the Maha Bharata explains, the real essence of the sacrifice is the inner faith of the one for whose intention it is offered than the ritual expertise of the priest. It is the Deity present in the heart that is invoked to be present in the idol consecrated by the priest.

Here again the unique contribution of Christianity is human fellowship centered in the one Son of God. The focus of Christian worship is the risen Christ present in the midst of the people. He is the High Priest who calls and gathers together all human beings as his brothers and sisters to share in his own Spirit and to address the Father as Abba.

Conclusion

Essence of Christianity is Christ, the Son of God made man. His human nature having for its 'self' the person of the Son of God provides a new head for human race, and a focal point for human history, transforming it into salvation history. This unique contribution of Christianity in no way contradicts the unique emphases of other religions, the covenantal focus of Judaism, the

obedient faith as well as prophetism of Islam, the deep interiority of Hinduism and the universal compassion and friendship of Buddhism centered in the illumination of Buddha. In the present condition of humanity there is only one order of salvation for all human beings and that is the order of grace, namely, sharing in the life of God. In that one economy of salvation, these different and seemingly disparate emphases are not contradictory nor even parallel, but integral parts of one single plan. Apart from errors, mistakes and misconceptions, which as consequence of human limitations, have to be corrected, all genuinely human concerns have to be reconciled in an authentically "catholic" religious perspective. Here the basic question of religious hermeneutics is not: which religion is right and which is wrong, which is superior and which is inferior, which is more developed and which underdeveloped, but rather what unique concern does a particular religion and its historical tradition express and what contribution does it make to the religious experience of humanity today. Hence any religion like Christianity that lays claim to acceptance by all humanity should also positively explain the place and positive role of other religions in the total plan of human salvation. One cannot do full justice to what God said and did in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity without seeing the Christian Revelation in the context of what God said and did in other nations and at other times. Since Christians form only less than one third of humanity, they cannot afford to ignore how God takes care of the salvation of the rest two thirds. This is particularly true of the millennia old Scriptures of other religious traditions, which were composed by holy men not without the special help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Hence interreligious dialogue and evangelization are two complementary functions of faith. Dialogue is to elicit the faith of other peoples, encourage them to tell us what God our common Father has told them. Dialogue is not a means for converting others but an effort to make other faiths intelligible in their own right, and in that way make our faith more intelligible and relevant both for ourselves and others. A willingness to dialogue with other believers regarding their faiths is an acknowledgement of the finiteness of all human traditions even with regard to the most fundamental truths. Evangelization, on the other hand, is communicating to others the Good News that we have received

that God has radically changed human history through the incarnation of His Son. It is also offering our service to gather together all human beings into a new worshipping community. This community itself is built up in concentric circles: First comes the intimate local community of all believers, to whatever religious tradition they may belong. They all worship the one God. Then comes the community of the baptized Christians who have received a special mission for the sake of humanity to proclaim the Gospel. The parish and the diocese are only wider circles of the Church as a community of service.

Here ecclesiology itself has to get out of the straight jacket of the Roman pyramidal structure of authority. The Church is a sacrament of salvation and hence a body of symbolism. All the sacraments make use of symbols drawn mostly from the nature of things. Then the Church should extend the symbolic role to other religions too and their wealth of traditional symbols. Though they all are not of the same kind, they have varying functions to serve in achieving the spiritual growth of human beings. In this the Church has to avoid the extremes of imperialism and relativism: Imperialism seeks to impose a uniform external structure on every one. Relativism, on the other hand, takes all religious symbols as equal and, therefore, fails to take seriously and communicate the unique salvific message that is drawn from and centres around the Body and Blood of the risen Christ.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this new religious hermeneutics is for the Roman authorities themselves. The old style of giving out authoritative statements on all religious matters to be blindly accepted by all Catholics is counterproductive today. As several Roman documents in recent times such as those on Eastern Meditation and Liberation Theology and panicky statements made in the recent consistory of Cardinals²⁶ clearly show that the people in Rome are neither well-informed nor competent in complex inter-religious issues today. What we need from the authorities is creative and imaginative leadership. Such leadership should act for the basic concerns of all peoples and nations.

John B. Chethimattam

The Church Encountering World Religions

(Conversation at the Gregorian University, Rome)

In view of the importance of the issue concerning the place and role of Christianity in a world of religious pluralism, *Jeevadhara* interviewed several important theologians at the Gregorian University, Rome, and at the University of Louvain. Some of the answers are given below as individual contributions. The interview at the Gregorian University was in the form of an informal conversation in which Dr. Gerard O'Collins S. J., Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Professors Jacques Dupuis S.J., and Sullivan S. J. took part. A brief summary of the points that emerged in the discussion is given below. Jean Galot S.J., professor emeritus of the same university gave his separate response.

The central concern and the issue implied in all recent theological discussions is this: what unique and specific contribution has Christianity to offer to Indians of other Religions? The growing fundamentalism in various religious groups and opposition to any kind of conversion work makes the question very crucial with regard to both the work of evangelization and honest inter-religious dialogue. The first question centres around the work of the Spirit in human salvation. Christ builds his church by giving to human beings his own Spirit. How far is the work of the Spirit conditioned and restricted by the human nature of Christ, the new head of humanity?

The Church through the document *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II has openly acknowledged the active presence of the Spirit in the hearts of women and men, irrespective of their religious persuasion. The Spirit is perceived as raising up the whole of humanity through the religious aspirations and enterprises of human beings. In all authentic experience of God, the Spirit is present and active. A distinction, however, has to be made in this work of the Spirit, between pre-Christian grace and Christian grace: Before the incarnation God's self-bestowal occurred through

the Word not yet incarnate. In the new dispensation this self-bestowal reaches us through Christ glorified in the Spirit; Jesus' humanity, transformed in glory by the Resurrection, becomes the source of all grace. There is no grace without the Spirit, or as Hans Urs von Balthasar has written, knowledge of the mystery of God through grace can never be produced except by the assumption of the creature into the process of Trinitarian love. The incarnation does not make any difference in the process except that it gives a human dimension to salvation: it is the glorified human Christ, freed from his space-time limitations through the Resurrection that gives his own Spirit to his sisters and brothers.

This makes the question of other religions more acute. All admit that there is only one economy of salvation for all humanity today and that is of grace. Since more than two thirds of human beings get answers to the fundamental questions of salvation through the non-Christian religions, and their Scriptures also contain God's Word, should they be considered to constitute a sort of parallel economy?

Theologians will not surely speak of them as parallel economies. As far as they contribute positively to the salvation of human beings and provide answers to basic questions they are integral to the one divine economy of salvation. Question will only be about the relative value of the content of the different religions and their ancient Scriptures. They are not indeed all addressing the same questions and as religions they are not all equal. Hence we cannot a priori approve all they propose as equally true and equally relevant. Each specific religious doctrine should be critically examined, and we should not rule out the possibility of misconceptions and errors in spite of the good intentions of people. To examine every one of the world religions and evaluate their tenets, rites and practices is a very difficult task to undertake. If the question is whether they have a relevance and meaning for us, of course, they will have meaning and value as far as we acknowledge them and deal with them as partners in the common service of humanity. Divine revelation in non-Christian religions has direct relevance for those who have not known the Christian revelation. For them it is the means of salvation. This is where inter-religious dialogue comes in, and an honest and sympathetic dialogue cannot dispense with a critical

examination of what we are presented with by our partner in dialogue. As we have to be critical of our own faith and not take it for granted, we should extend the same courtesy to our friends in dialogue and not leave them with what we honestly think to be erroneous or inadequate. But to those who have known Christian revelation and attained an experience of God in the person of Christ the revelation in non-Christian religions cannot have a direct relevance.

But the question raised is whether, knowing that the millennia old scriptures of other religions contain God's revelation, we can do justice to God speaking in the Bible if we do not also consider what God said and did in the total context of his dealing with the whole humanity throughout the course of human history. In fact if we choose to ignore revelation in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam will we not be missing three fundamental dimensions of our Christian experience, namely revelation as intuitive experience in Hinduism, as tradition in Buddhism and as direct disclosure of God's Word as in Islam? As emperor Asoka stated in his rock edict XII do not other religions have a relevance as dimensions of our own faith?

Here the question is what is practically possible and what is sufficient and complete. We do not have the time or leisure to go to the Jew right across the street and examine his Hebrew texts and all the Talmudic wealth, even though his tradition is very close to ours. How can then any one single person attempt to study the Sanskrit texts of the Hindus, Arabic scriptures of Muslims and the like assuming that it is necessary for the integrity of one's faith. As long as one is not closed to the possibility of other relevant information, one's Christian tradition has an integrity and completeness of its own.

One should not, in any case, go to the extreme proposed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith: In his effort to bring all religions into a single common religious history of humanity he says that only those questions that will be recognized as relevant by the Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims and other world religions should go into the make up of a "world theology". Buddhists and Christians should not be reduced into a single history. They arose in radically different historical situations, ran different courses. Such reductionism makes religious dialogue itself irrelevant: One can have

many answers to the same questions. If pluralism belongs to the very structure of history no religion has any monopoly for answers to the basic questions of existence. Radical diversity even in the conception of religious questions and even in the understanding of history makes interreligious dialogue and the work of evangelization universally meaningful.

The crucial question, however, is whether the work of evangelization or interreligious dialogue should be given priority. It is common knowledge here that on the table of the Prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization there is a document that argues that if one is convinced of one's faith and its sufficiency for salvation and one is honest about it, interreligious dialogue will have meaning only as a means for evangelization. It would be a disaster if that document were to be published, since it would show that all the recent Christian initiative for dialogue with other religions was a sham. But when the work of evangelization is motivated by the thought that one's position is absolutely true and everybody else wrong and that others are in danger of going down to hell, there is the temptation to convert the other fellow by any means whatever. This is what happened when the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers went to America. Some theologians had already opined during the Crusades that Muslims who did not embrace Christianity after being properly informed about the Gospel were "infidels" and that they could be made slaves. Now the conquerors went to Africa, read the Christian creed in Latin to the Negroes. Since the poor people did not understand what was being read and did not become Christians they were declared infidels, captured and sold in boat-loads as slaves to the American colonisers. Cardinal Cajetan as he was writing his commentary on St. Thomas heard about this procedure and called it the theology of plunder!

Dialogue becomes important only when one realizes that one's faith, though true and adequate, is not all sufficient by itself. As human understanding of divine self-disclosure, it needs to be completed by other people's experience of the same divine reality. In this perspective dialogue and evangelization are complementary: As a missionary once stated his policy of evangelization, "I have to find out first from people I preach to, what God has already told them in order that I may meaningfully communicate what God has told me".

Our Old Theology Is Still Correct and Valid

(Conversation with Fr. Jean Galot S. J.,
professor emeritus, Gregorian Univ., Rome)

Jeevadhara: How far are Christians tied to divine revelation in other religions for the understanding of their own faith? Is the work of the Spirit restricted by the created humanity of Christ?

Fr. Jean Galot: I should say as to the activity of the Spirit being restricted by the activity of Christ, there is no restriction by Christ at all. All the activity of the Spirit is comprehended by Christ.

J.: But why should I go back two thousand years to Jesus of Nazareth? Can I not experience the spirit right now in the cave of my own heart?

G.: No. Because in the present order of human history, the divine activity of divinizing the human kind is only because of Christ and it is the choice of God. The play of salvation is that the Spirit acts in the life of every member of humanity dependently of Christ, its new head, and this is true even in those who do not know Christ, and even in those who reject Christ. Even though Christ was born only at a particular moment in time, the Christ glorified through the resurrection transcends time and his role extends also to the ages before him. Humanity is one and human history is one.

J.: What is the role of the Church? Is its sacramental ministry exclusivistic?

G.: When Christ spoke of his Church he spoke of one Church. The Church, the restored humanity, is an essential part of the divine plan for human salvation. Thus though a Hindu does not belong visibly to the Church, when he receives divine grace he receives it in relationship to the Church. Even prior to the choice of an individual to belong to the Church (even if it be through the Baptism of desire) it is the plan of God and of Christ that grace should be communicated to all in relationship to the Church. A human being can become authentically human not in

isolation all by himself, but only in relationship to the authentically restored humanity that is the Church. It is the visible Church that is the locus of salvation, though the individual's relationship to it may not be visible.

J.: What about the religious Scriptures? Is there not today an emerging consciousness of the complementarity of all religions and religious scriptures?

G.: All religious scriptures have certain elements that are inspired by the Spirit and are used by the Spirit like rays of light to illumine the minds of people. For example some Hindu sacred writings contain great many genuine elements of religious experience. But we cannot say that there is an equivalence of those scriptures. The other scriptures are not something like the revelation in the Gospels. They do not have the same authority. The difference is not exactly in the truth content, but in their relation to Christ, the incarnate Word. In this respect even the books of the Old Testament are in view of the incarnation of Christ, and the New Testament writings look back to the event of the Incarnation and the person of Christ, the Son of God, in whom we are made sons and daughters of the one Father. The same cannot be said about the scriptures of other religions.

J.: What is the relation between evangelization and inter-religious dialogue?

G.: We have to say that evangelization as presented in the Gospels has to be in the form of dialogue. We cannot impose faith on any one. We can only bear witness to our faith and to Christ, and invite others to share in our faith. Besides, when we talk of the Hindus and followers of other religions there is also the question of time, the time fixed by the Father, the *kairos*, the time of salvation intended by God. We can only present the Gospel. Its acceptance will come only at the opportune time. Of course, the Holy Spirit is already in the hearts of people and the Risen Christ is there and we are not dispensing faith. Faith is already there. But that faith in them is not explicit. The scope of mission work is to make explicit what is implicit and to give positive expression to faith in life. Besides, the faith of the believing Hindu is not faith in the full sense, because it has not found its proper person-to-person expression which is realized in the commitment to the person of Christ.

The Cultural Linguistic Model for Theology

A Critical Evaluation

For Roman Catholics, the Second Vatican Council represented the dawning of a new era in the relation of the church to non-Christian religions. For the first time, the doctrine of the universality of salvation has been enunciated in magisterial documents in a way that admits non-Christian religions as positive means of grace and salvation¹. This optimism is perhaps nowhere more dramatically expressed than in the fourth eucharistic prayer, which praises God the Father for leading *all* people "to seek and to find" him.

This new attitude has opened the way both to invigorated ecumenical dialogue and to new challenges to Christian theology. Naturally, not all Christian theologians (or, *a fortiori*, religious leaders) have been equally receptive to these trends. In recent years there has been a significant reaction against the perceived excesses of "liberal" theology. In particular, there is a renewed emphasis in many contemporary Christian theologies on Biblical revelation, the uniqueness of Christ, and the privileged place of the Christian tradition in the economy of salvation.

A particularly intellectually challenging perspective within this tendency is presented by Yale theologian George Lindbeck's proposal of applying to theology a "cultural-linguistic" model derived from a social-scientific approach to religion².

1 See, for example, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Redemptoris Missio* 10.

2 George A Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). The chapter concerning salvation in non-Christian religions largely derives from ideas Lindbeck had developed earlier in his article "*Fides ex auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians: Contemporary Catholic and Protestant Positions", in *The*

Lindbeck suggests that theology should adopt the empirical and linguistic-analytic view of religion as "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought"³. Basing his position on the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein, Lindbeck holds that there can be no uninterpreted or unschematized experiences; our linguistic and cultural systems are the precondition for having an experience at all⁴. A religion is then like a language or culture, a communal reality "that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities"⁵. That is, external and communal cultural phenomena produce religious experience, not *vice-versa*⁶. In contrast to what Lindbeck calls the "experiential-expressive" model, this view therefore rejects the notion that there is an underlying unity to religious experience, expressing itself in different ways:

A religion is above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a pre-existing self or of pre-conceptual experience. The *verbum internum* (traditionally equated by Christians with the action of the Holy Spirit) is also crucially important, but it would be understood in a theological use of the model as a capacity for hearing and accepting the true religion, the true external word, rather than (as experiential-expressivism would have it) as a common experience diversely articulated in different religions⁷.

Thus Lindbeck holds that there is no inner experience of God common to all people: "Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience; rather, they have different experiences"⁸.

Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 92-123.

3 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 33.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.

5 *Loc. cit.*

6 Lindbeck admits that this is simplistic; there is a mutual causality between religions and experiences. Nevertheless, in contrast to "experiential-expressivist" thinkers, he holds that it is the external religious and cultural factors which are primary. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 34; See also *Fides ex auditu*, p. 99.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 40. Lindbeck later modifies this statement, however, by admitting that "some aspects of some religions, as the experiential-expressive model suggests, may diversely objectify the same or similar experiences" (p. 52).

Lindbeck's theological application of this view has important consequences for the relation of Christianity to other religions. Since there is no common framework for religious experience, religions may have totally incommensurable categories (like Buddhist "Nirvana" and the Christian "God")⁹. Moreover, since the meaning of religious categories is determined by the narratives of the particular tradition in which they occur, we cannot presume that different religions are referring to the same reality, even when they use the same word, like "God":

"many Christians have maintained that the stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus are part of the referential meaning of the word 'God' as this is used in biblical religion and have therefore concluded that philosophers and others who do not advert to these narratives mean something else by 'God'."¹⁰

The same holds true of the apparent similarities in morality or fundamental religious attitudes:

The datum that all religions recommend something which can be called "love" toward that which is taken to be most important ("God") is a banality as uninteresting as the fact that all languages are (or were) spoken. The significant things are the distinctive patterns of story, belief, ritual, and behaviour that give "love" and "God" their specific and sometimes contradictory meanings¹¹.

These positions allow one to conceive the Christian claim to unsurpassable truth in the strongest possible form: namely, "that there is only one religion which has the concepts and categories that enable it to refer to the religious object"¹². Other religions would be categorically false and propositionally meaningless when referring to the ultimate reality¹³. (From this, of course, it is not so very far to Karl Barth's celebrated remark that "the God of Mohammed is an idol, just like all the other idols".)

What then of the salvation of non-Christians? "They would seem inevitably to have less of a chance than those who adhere to the one true faith. Or, to put it another way, there must be some value in being religiously right if this is to be preferred to being religiously wrong."¹⁴

9 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

10 Ibid., p. 48.

11 Ibid., p. 42.

12 Ibid., p. 50.

13 Loc. cit.

14 Ibid., p. 53.

Nevertheless, Lindbeck wishes to affirm the possibility of salvation for non-Christians. He rejects the idea of a universal pre-reflexive experience of the grace of Christ (as proposed for example by Rahner and Lonergan) as contrary to the basic insight of the cultural-linguistic approach, for which the external word is primary: saving faith comes *ex auditu*, from hearing the message about Christ¹⁵. The only current hypothesis on salvation for non-Christians that Lindbeck finds compatible with the cultural-linguistic model is a "prospective *fides ex auditu*" theory: salvation can only be through an explicit encounter with the crucified and risen Lord, which in the case of non-Christians takes place at the moment of death¹⁶.

The idea that the only possibility of salvation is through conversion to Christ, either in this life or after death, might seem to be discouraging to ecumenical relations. Lindbeck admits that the "claim of superiority or unsurpassability when combined with concern for fellow human beings, would seem to lead almost inevitably to polemics and proselytizing" instead of dialogue¹⁷. Nevertheless, Lindbeck asserts that

This view of the salvation of non-Christians seems wholly compatible with...the need for dialogue and cooperation with other religions. To hold that a particular language is the only one that has the words and concepts that can authentically speak of the ground of being, the goal of history, and true humanity (for Christians believe they cannot genuinely speak of these apart from telling and retelling the biblical story) is not at all the same as denying that other religions have resources for speaking truths and referring to realities, even highly important truths and realities, of which Christianity as yet knows nothing and by which it could be greatly enriched¹⁸.

15 Ibid., p. 57. *Vid.* Rom 10:17. Joseph A. DiNoia raises similar objections, basing himself on Aquinas's analysis of faith. See his "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians" in *The Thomist* vol. 47, no. 2 (1983), pp. 209-241.

16 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 59. Cf. DiNoia, *op. cit.*, pp. 235ff. In difference to Lindbeck, DiNoia ascribes saving value to the loving lives led by non-Christians; but their own beliefs and valuations would be irrelevant to this saving conduct (p. 238).

17 Ibid., p. 55f.

18 Ibid., p. 61.

Lindbeck argues that this approach is actually more conducive to dialogue than one that supposes that Christians have explicit knowledge of what is "implicit" in the depths of other believers' experience¹⁹. Religions may be complementary in that they provide guidance to different but not incompatible dimensions of existence²⁰; other faiths may be God-willed anticipations of some aspects of the coming kingdom that are not within the purview of revealed religion²¹. Thus Lindbeck believes that Christians have motivation for conversation with non-Christian religions, even though the latter cannot be means of salvation even for their own adherents.

Lindbeck's use of the cultural-linguistic model obviously fits well with the Lutheran tradition of *solus Christus* and *sola fides*²²; salvation is through God's action in Christ alone, and access to that action is through faith in him. His concerns and viewpoints, however, to a large degree coincide not only with those of the empirical study of religion, but also with those of theologians of a Barthian tendency²³, traditional Thomists, and followers of Hans Urs von Balthasar²⁴; hence the importance and influence of his ideas in contemporary theology, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.

Lindbeck's theological suggestions are obviously at odds with a great deal of current thinking about the relation of Christianity and world religions. A careful and critical response on the part of those who hold that there is only one economy of grace, embracing all people and operative in all religions, would be of value not merely in meeting the questions raised by this particular theology, but in setting forth a religious hermeneutics which can

19 Ibid., p. 61. Lindbeck explicitly mentions Rahner's theory of "anonymous" Christianity.

20 Ibid., p. 52

21 Ibid., p. 54f.

22 In his earlier article, much of which appears unchanged in *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck explicitly presents his proposal as a specifically "Protestant" approach. See "*Fides ex auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians" p. 92.

23 This is true even though, as Lindbeck himself points out, Barth's own theology in some ways contrasts sharply with Lindbeck's Lutheran perception of Reformation theology. See, for example, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 104-105

24 Von Balthasar's critique of Rahner's theology of universal salvation is well known; see for example his *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (Einsiedeln, 1966), pp. 84-96, 100-109; 124-129.

serve as a positive basis for inter-religious dialogue, and perhaps in dispelling some of the fears and misapprehensions that seem to be operative in the minds of some Christian leaders and theologians.

It is of course impossible in a brief paper to undertake a point by point discussion of the issues raised by Lindbeck. Many are addressed by other papers in this journal. Several points, however, may be noted here.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the legitimate insights of the "cultural-linguistic" approach and the theological use that Lindbeck makes of them. Certainly it is quite true to say that concrete religious meanings are constituted and limited by the cultural and linguistic "worlds" that produce them. In consequence, it is necessary to recognize and respect the real diversity of religions, their conceptual incommensurability on some issues, and the possibility of real disagreement among them on matters in which they do share a common point of reference. Christians must also heed the warning against the "imperialism" of regarding other religions merely as defective or "implicit" or "anonymous" forms of Christianity.

But these insights by no means exclude the theological affirmation of universally operative grace and revelation. Such an affirmation need not imply that all people have "the same" basic experience, of which their religions are simply different "expressions"²⁵ — even though, as Lindbeck himself admits²⁶, one can

25 The universal "transcendental experience" which is sometimes spoken of by followers of Rahner or Lonergan does not, of course, imply a common *content* to human experiences; it refers to the conscious (and in this analogous sense "experienced") dynamism toward the *mystery* of being — i. e., toward what is always beyond the conceptual and symbolic. The consciousness of this dynamism, however, is not a categorical experience alongside or "behind" others; rather it exists and is experienced *in* the concrete "formulations" which are constituted by a person's symbolic world. At the same time, this dynamism is what makes it possible to have concrete experiences at all, and to recognize their limitations.

26 One of the frustrating aspects of Lindbeck's argument in *The Nature of Doctrine* is that he appears to shift ground: at times he speaks as though the "experiential-expressive" and the "cultural-linguistic" models are complementary, and the differences between them largely of emphasis (so, for example, pp. 33f., 39, 42, 52); at other times, particularly with regard to theological issues, he presents them as incompatible alternatives.

expect that human beings, however diverse their circumstances, will have *some* commonality or at least *analogy*²⁷ in their experiences. (This is, after all, why languages can be translated, and why it is possible to learn another besides one's own; likewise, it is what makes mutually enriching religious dialogue possible²⁸.) Indeed, it is difficult to say exactly who is supposed to hold the "experiential-expressivist" position that Lindbeck sets up as a foil to his own²⁹. It is clearly not an adequate representation of Roman Catholic "transcendental" theology, which is quite open to a "cultural-linguistic" explanation of the categorical achievement of religion³⁰.

The assertion that "the faiths by which men [sic] live, whether Christian or non-Christian, are always acquired *ex auditu*"³¹ — that is, that one's experience of and relation to God are formed by the narratives of a particular community, and hence by its cultural and linguistic structures — is thus not at odds with the affirmation of a universal revelation and offer of grace. If human conceptual and linguistic achievement can be inspired by God at all, so that it constitutes God's self-revelation, then it is clearly possible that more than one or even all such systems can be so inspired³².

27 Lindbeck's lack of attention to the notion of analogy is one of the weaknesses of his presentation, and perhaps one of the reasons why he seems at times to fall into the "black and white" fallacy.

28 To take a concrete example: certainly the word *Jeevadharma* has different nuances, deriving from the Hindu tradition, from the Christian notion of universal charity; yet there is enough recognizable similarity in the *intentionality* of the two ideas to make them analogous. The differences enrich both traditions, which can learn from each other new aspects of the dynamism of love, which surpasses any conceptual symbolization.

29 One might perhaps think of Radhakrishnan, or John Hick.

30 Lindbeck is aware and explicitly states that Rahner and Lonergan — the two representatives of transcendental theology he deals with — cannot accurately be named "experiential-expressivists"; yet, curiously, he opts to subsume them under that category. See *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 16.

He is also aware that Rahner's *Vorgriff auf Esse* is not separable from categorical or linguistic schematization (*ibid.*, p. 43, n. 18); yet in his critique he seems to forget this. He does not advert to Lonergan's idea of transcendence as achievement, nor to his category of "constitutive meaning", nor to the explicit treatment of the acquired linguistic *a priori* by Schillebeeckx or by such transcendental philosophers as Jose Gomez-Caffarena and J. B. Lotz.

31 Lindbeck, *Fides ex auditu*, p. 119.

32 Indeed, the analogy of language itself makes it seem implausible that any

The crucial issue is thus not the validity of the cultural-linguistic model of understanding religions, nor the possibility of universal grace, but the question of the relation of that grace to Christ as savior and, conversely, the relevance of the historical person of Jesus and the tradition stemming from him to other avenues of salvation.

The scandal of historical particularity, as much as the scandal of the cross, is the mark of the Christian tradition. Edward Schillebeeckx points out that against the temptation to make Jesus into merely "the symbolic point of reference of a kind of *mysticism of being*", the New Testament, even in its most universalist moments (the Deutero-Pauline epistles, for example), insists that it is the *historical* Jesus who is the point of access to God. Likewise Johannine theology, "which most markedly demonstrates a degree of God-mysticism, nevertheless attacks any *kein tòn lesōin* (1 John 4:3), that is, any attempt to do away with Jesus of Nazareth in favour of a heavenly or spiritual Christ principle"³³.

The New Testament authors, however, had not had to encounter the theological question posed by contemporary knowledge of other religions; hence our question cannot simply be resolved by reference to their perspective. Nevertheless, it would seem that the claim to find in Jesus God's definitive self-revelation cannot be abandoned without the danger of losing Christianity's essence and its most distinctive contribution; for is it not the revelation of the incarnational and sacramental principle – the finding of the divine in and through the finite and particular, with the consequent eternal valuation of personal and relational being, and the resulting morality of love – that is Christianity's major offering to religious thought?

The attempt to reconcile the indispensability of Jesus Christ with the universality of grace and the positive salvific value of

single symbolic system could be "categorically true" and all the rest "categorically false" — even though it is clear that different languages can have varying degrees of adequacy for dealing with different aspects of existence. Moreover it is a fact that people from different religious traditions, despite their differences, do *in fact* find basic similarities or analogies in their orientations to the Ultimate including (*pace* Lindbeck) the dynamism to love.

33 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ. The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (trans. John Bowden) (New York: Seabury, 1980) p. 465

other religions has led to significant new perspectives in Christian theology: from "inclusivist" theories that see other religions as anticipations of and participations in Christ³⁴ to more radical reconsiderations of the meaning of Jesus' uniqueness that entertain the possibility of multiple saving events, without in any way diminishing the "definitiveness" of Christ³⁵. These cannot be discussed here. But precisely because it is confident in the indispensable insight and the transforming power of its message, the church should have no defensive fear of such explorations, nor of admitting that it can also receive from others. There may be aspects of God's total "Word" that are to be learned from the achievements of genuine grace-filled conversion in other contexts and cultures than those which have constituted the history of Christianity. The sacramentality of the church need not be conceived as "over against" the other religions, surpassing and abrogating them, but as a dialogue which includes the "sacramentality" of human history as a whole, and of religious history in particular. In the exploration of these realities, the insights of cultural-linguistic and narrative theology, shorn of theological exclusivism, can prove of great value.

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34 See, for example, Karl Rahner: *Foundations of Christian Faith* (trans. William Dych) N. Y: Seabury, 1978), p. 313; also *Redemptoris Missio*, 5

35 See my "How is Christ Absolute? Rahner's Christology and the Encounter of World Religions" in *Philosophy and Theology*, vol. II no. 3 (Spring 1988), pp. 230-231; also, *Answering for Faith: Christ and the Human Search for Salvation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 232ff

Christian Approach to Other Religions from a Sociologist's Perspective

My competence is not in the area of theology and hence I cannot give an "authoritative" answer, with or without quotation marks, to the question of other religions. My field of study is the social doctrine of the church. The question of whether there can be a social teaching of the Church without taking into account other religions may very well be posed here. Today the language of theology is not primarily philosophy, particularly metaphysics, but that of the human sciences.

Hence the Church in its social teaching can never ignore other religions. The Church has, of course, its own idea of the dignity of the human person, of freedom and the like as the starting point of examining issues. These are abstract principles and are rather theoretical. Social questions have their concrete cultural and religious aspects. Everything should be seen together. We cannot analyze concrete situations without carefully examining the cultural and religious context of the problems, beliefs of people, their positive understanding of their life and their total outlook on life. That is why Pope Paul VI said in his *Octogesimo Adveniens* that he could not give a universal and adequate answer to social questions. That should be left to the local churches which should make their own analysis of the problems. Social questions are not merely a matter of economics, but imply culture and religion. They depend on how in different situations people think and how religious concepts and values affect their outlook. Thus in India, for example, the social and cultural life of the people in general is penetrated by a number of ideas and values of Hinduism. Hence there cannot be an adequate analysis of the social situation of India without taking into account the religious values. There is not an absolute and universal Catholic social doctrine by way of a third way, as John Paul II explicitly stated in his social encyclical. What the church can do is merely to interpret the social reality as it is out there, animated, and

inspired by the religious and cultural values of the people that are actually involved

Certainly, there is an apparent duality between the language of interpretation and the social reality that is interpreted. There is need to maintain a continuity with the past and use the categories and idioms that are drawn from the European context in which the social experience of the Church in the recent past began. But when it reaches out to new situations the language also changes. This is best exemplified in its encounter with the Liberation Theology of Latin America. The Latin American situation is entirely unique and new and the ideal is the "preferential option for the poor". But Pope John Paul II's idea of solidarity brings this new situation into a synthesis with the old. It is not a question of a condescending "preference", but "of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category" (*On Social Concern* 38). It is accepting the religious values as they are actually in the social situation. "Solidarity helps to see the 'other' — whether a person, people or nation — not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and discarded when no longer useful, but as our 'neighbour', a 'helper' to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God" (*Ibid.* 39).

Pope John Paul II shows another role of the Church in the social field with regard to the other religions, namely the specific witness of the Church. This is specially apparent in his discussion of culture. In discussing questions instead of remaining purely on the empirical level and accepting the implied religious values, he rises to a transcendental level and gives a critique of culture itself. Social reality itself is complex. It is not simply a question of opposing one empirical system to another, but meeting all social and cultural systems from a higher theological angle. This is not imposing a doctrinaire or abstract system from the outside but bearing witness to and making explicit the deeper values that are already in the situation. This is the specific task of the Church in any given situation: not only to accept what is given but also to critically evaluate the underlying thought and motivation.

Does not this interaction with cultures and values derived from other religions radically affect the identity of the Church itself? Here what we have to ask is: What is the Church? For Augustine the Church was very much identified with the culture of the Roman empire. So when the Roman empire crumbled he was afraid that the Church itself was dying. All his theological ideas were formulated within the framework of the Roman empire. But he also realized that the Church could not be identified with any particular culture and that it had to look to the future. This was the main thrust of his *City of God*. Today also the same situation exists: The Church's life has been very much restricted to the framework of European culture, and its theology to a great part has been formulated in terms of it. The church has to free itself from all such cultural identifications and has to look to the future and be open to all cultures.

The problem here is to discern and decide what is essential to the identity of the Church and what is purely got from the Western scholastic way of thinking. This latter can be shed by the church without in any way losing its identity. But the answer to this question is fraught with tensions. The problem always existed as exemplified in the conflicts connected with Gallicanism and other nationalistic claims on the church. The answer is that the Church can be at the same time French and Christian, Indian and Christian. Here the special problem will be in dealing with philosophical concepts expressing faith, when one wants to pass from the conceptual system derived from Hebrew culture to those received from Greek culture or Roman culture or Indian culture.

What is of fundamental importance today is mature leadership from the part of theologians and church leaders. The Church has tremendous opportunity today to make its message relevant to the modern world. There is an opening to the Eastern religions in Asia, a missionary opening in Africa and to rethink our theology in the face of social problems in Latin America. In the past when such opportunities occurred the Church took leadership to encourage people to profit from the challenges. There is also risk and some are afraid to meet the new situation. When Aristotle was in a way rediscovered in Europe people thought his philosophy would destroy faith and paganize the church. But people like Thomas Aquinas, Albert and Bonaventure provided courageous

leadership. Even in translating the Bible into the local languages there was resistance, and some thought that ordinary people reading the Bible in their mother tongue would be misled. But finally the local languages won the day against Latin. The leadership came sometimes from certain charismatic individuals like Augustine and Aquinas, and at other times from groups of individuals. What we should do in the present critical opportunity of encountering the dynamism of world religions is to encourage true leadership to emerge and evolve in the Church.

Christian missionaries were the best examples of the openness of the Church to other religions. I have heard that one of our missionaries going to a new mission field told the people: "Tell me what God has told in your history and religious tradition, and I shall tell you what God has told us". The story may be right or wrong. One cannot, however, deny the fact that Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in India accepted a good deal of religio-cultural elements from the people and presented the Gospel in a way intelligible to them. Yet, the missionaries were children of their age, and might have sometimes unwittingly become collaborators of colonial powers. Their actions were to a great extent influenced by the dynamics of the society then, and it is centuries later that we judge them and find out that their actions were favouring colonialism.

Even today the question is how far we can go in accommodating the values and concerns of other religions without losing our own identity. Take the example of certain Liberation Theologies, and their reinterpretation of the Bible. Their materialistic reading of the Bible can, surely, clarify certain points. But does it do justice to the Bible or to the message of salvation? The Church has to be faithful to her mission. It is easy to criticize the people in authority as old-fashioned and to lose sight of the central issues themselves. What has to be avoided as most unhelpful in the present transitional situation is a public confrontation between those who hold on to old ways of thinking and those with more liberal approaches to issues. Only silent, scientific, hard work can promote peace and productivity.

Search for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

Today our primary interest is not in theoretical systems but in practical methods of approach to solve the problems we face today. My limited experience in this is in working with the WCC in preparation for the world convocation held at Seoul, Korea, in 1990, on the theme "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation". In the spirit of the conciliar process there was a Council of the European Churches (CEC) in which I participated as a designee of the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences. This regional preparatory conference, which came to be known as the "European Ecumenical Assembly: Peace with Justice", took place from May 15-21, 1990, in Basel, Switzerland. What may be of special interest with regard to the approach to World Religions is what I learned from working with people of different confessional traditions on matters of common world interest.

Though "Peace with Justice" may sound a topic limited to the political sphere, it was taken as symbolic of "Peace with Justice for the Whole Creation". It calls for a holistic approach to these vital issues of our day. Those who are daily involved with issues of peace understand that peace cannot be discussed without prior attention being given to justice, and discussion of justice inevitably leads to the question of peace and of our relationship with the whole of our environment. What we saw in all the papers and heard in all the discussions in the Assembly and afterwards was the ultimate interconnectedness of the areas of the topic.

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation quite evidently involve issues that affect and afflict the whole human kind. The problems and challenges contained within that title are human-wide and world-wide. They involve all of us, indeed the whole of the living world as we know it, not only ourselves, but all the generations of every species for the future. For example the scourge

of war is not limited to the generation that endures that war. We Europeans, in particular, are aware of the lasting effects of the war of 1939-45. The same must be said for the Vietnamese, the Nicaraguans, the Lebanese, and the people of Iraq and Kuwait and every people who has suffered the tragedy and senselessness of the more than one hundred wars that have plagued the world since the end of the last so-called "World War".

That only Christians were involved in our discussions did not mean that the problems affected only us. The fact that all Christian churches cooperated in the discussions shows that the issues are not parochial. In discussing justice and peace the Christian churches, especially those in Europe understand themselves to bear a particular burden: They represent a heritage that professes to proclaim a "Gospel of Peace". And yet, those same christian churches have a history of collusion with the forces of violence and war. Individuals and groups of Christians have been known to support ideologies that have ultimately led to conflict and war. Christian symbols have been even appropriated to sacralize belligerent purposes. In the same line, a certain "domination mentality" is said to have been present in Western culture. It has also been linked to the contemporary ecological crises that threaten the entire globe. The Judeo-Christian heritage is not infrequently equated with support for the destruction or at least devaluation of nature as a mere object in the hands of mankind. While the Christian churches have long felt that it was their task to announce the "Good News of the Gospel" to all the peoples of the world, christianity was also joined to the vehicles of colonization and exploitation. So it was exported throughtout the world as something divided within itself. The announcement of the good news in european languages was simultaneously a translation of that message into european prejudices.

Unity is, therefore, the first item in all ecumenical agenda. But this search for unity should not be construed as something inward oriented among Christians alone. Unity among Christians can only have as its goal the unity of all human kind. As the final document of the above mentioned Basel Assembly notes, some would ascribe the present situation of crisis to modern science and technology. The abuse of technology, to a certain extent, is responsible for the increasing exploitation and destruction

of the environment as well as for the irresponsible manipulation of human life. Yet, the document itself says, "the real causes are to be sought in the very heart of human kind, in human attitudes and mentalities. Even the abuse of nature is based on a pretence of superiority by human beings over all other beings in the natural world".

To change our attitudes and mentality as a whole we have to return to the source of our being, and open our lives to a radical conversion. Even our fundamental beliefs have to be questioned. Thus the Ecumenical Assembly of European Christian Churches faced its most difficult task in defining the content and shape of the so-called "faith" which we Christians claim to hold in common. In fact that faith is common to all human beings, since fundamentally it is faith in God, the maker and sustainer of all, as well as a gift from God, who creates, saves and liberates. Our God is the God of justice, and it is God's justice that must be our standard, not the limited and often primitive sense of justice fashioned by human beings to serve their own purposes. Our God is the God of peace, and peace is God's free gift: Only God can ultimately forgive, can reconcile all things to himself and to each other.

Our role as humans is that of keeper, steward, manager, and protector, knowing at all times that we do not own the world in which we live, and yet, that we are responsible for its progress under our management. Hence the faith that all God's children can affirm together can teach also humility. It is also a faith that can be a source of hope. For if God can and does forgive and reconcile, if God's justice can be imitated though not duplicated, and if God's creation can be healed by prudent stewardship, there is reason to hope.

This new attitude of faith and hope as well as a strategy for the future requires an ethical foundation. First of all we have to recognize that specifically as Christians we have no corner on the market of ethical insight and reasoning. Our very faith affirms the goodness of God, the goodness of his creation, and the fundamental ability of human persons to act rightly – whatever the source of their knowledge of the good. In my personal opinion, there is not a distinct biblical morality either, in the sense that we can find moral codes that would allow us deductively to map out every facet of human behaviour. Biblical morality demands application and that means interpretation. Ultimately we are left with the question about the relation between the biblical faith and the moral challenges that face us today and will face us tomorrow. Our shared biblical faith may inspire us, but it gives us no answers, no concrete solutions.

A Church in Bondage: The Challenges for Religion in Latin America Today

As everyone knows Christianity came to Latin America with a sword: The Spanish and Portuguese conquerors thought that it was their duty to conquer the world for Christ. That was the mood and mentality of the age. Muslim conquerors went the same way: Only their ideal was to conquer the world for Islam and establish God's rule in the world destroying every other religion which they thought to be idolatry. Of course, in Spain there were people who thought otherwise and the theologians of Salamanca sketched out a framework of rights and obligations to guide the relationship between the invaders and the Indians, and they even inspired certain royal decrees. But all these were definitely a dead letter in the newly discovered world, especially since people in power, according to popular theology, believed that if the Indians and Negroes were not baptized they could not be saved; so they had to be baptized even by force.

But Christian faith we accepted and we have lived it for five centuries. In the beginning faith was domination and slavery. Concretely the rights of the Indians were not recognized. Their lives were sacrificed to the conqueror's greed for gold and profits. A whole race was crushed by war, in the mines, and on the estates granted by the Spanish kings. On the island of Espanola, the present Santo Domingo, where Columbus landed, a whole population of peaceful Indians was completely exterminated in less than one hundred years. There were 25 million Indians in Mexico on the arrival of Hernan Cortes. A century later there were not more than a million and seventy five thousand. There was a shortage of manpower throughout America, so to solve this economic problem the conquerors committed the arbitrary importing of human merchandise, slaves trapped in Africa and sold in

America. Their number is calculated to be ten million in all. It was the day of the conquerors, and only their culture and values had any influence.

When the Latin American countries gained their independence at the early part of the 19th century, we became a mission country. Missionaries went into the jungles and mountains and they discovered poverty, and they brought back that poverty to transform the church, from the church of the colonial powers and their rich descendants into the church of the poor. That process was under way long before Vatican Council II, and after the Council it came to a climax in the Latin American Bishops' Conference, meeting at Medellin in 1968. The Conference faced two facts: On the one side the tremendous social injustices existing in Latin America holding the great majority of our people in painful poverty and extreme human misery, and on the other side the growing consciousness of the oppressed regarding the situation they faced. Serious reflection brought the realization that this situation is neither casual nor transitory, and that it had its roots in the social, economic and political structures. It was a clear case of institutionalized violence: Entire populations encountered a lack of bare necessities and lived in such dependence that deprived them of initiative and responsibility as well as of the possibility of promoting their culture and participating in the social and political life. So Medellin declared a preferential option for the poor and strenuous struggle on their side as the basic policy of the Church.

Ten years later in the Conference at Puebla in Mexico the emphasis shifted to the question of culture. I am a Peruvian and I came to my own culture as a tourist. The original culture of Latin America was looked down upon. Only the European culture was respected. I studied first in the American school and later in the French school, and only then realized that I was a foreigner to my own native culture. Even for economic liberation a cultural liberation is needed. The essence of evangelization is to inspire the social and cultural context with the Gospel values. The process of liberation should be total. Only if I respect my society and its culture will I have incentive to improve its economic and political condition. In this light we can understand our problems today.

One of the important problems for us today is a lack of sufficient number of priests and religious to minister to the needs of the people. What is the reason for this? There is no anticlericalism here. In the opinion of 81% of the people the Church is the most beneficent and liked institution. Till very recent times — leave out the case of the Negroes — even the Indians could not be ordained, since the supposition was that they did not have the cultural refinement for the priesthood. Only the Creoles, the descendants of Europeans had that cultural excellence! Then there is the condition of celibacy. Our late Cardinal Juan Landazuri Ricketts was a conservative. But even he used to say, in this matter Rome does not understand us, and until Rome really grasps the situation, there cannot be a solution!

The second problem is political and economic. We were for a long time under military dictatorship as elsewhere in Latin America. We have returned to democracy, a weak democracy with serious violations of human rights. Economic turmoil is the aftermath of such irresponsible government. In the last five years we had 5000% inflation. The heavy foreign debt, and the fact that our natural resources are exploited by foreign capital and the existence of the extremist and terrorist movement of Sendero Luminoso which aims solely at obtaining total power over the people, make the situation very difficult. 59% of the population is under the poverty line. All these constitute a situation of death. The task of the Church in this situation is to be a symbol of hope and be on the side of the poor to help them and to fight with them for their rights. This is what we are doing. Even a theologian like Gustavo Gutierrez does not remain in a seminary or university but in a parish in a poor neighbourhood, in order to be with the people in their need.

Perhaps the most serious problem is the disaffection of the elite. The rich, the educated and those who belong to higher cultural standards are not seen to give any importance to their religion. Of course, in the whole Latin American world church-going and Sunday attendance at Mass cannot be taken as a sign of their faith. In spite of Canon Law people do not take Sunday-attendance important or necessary. They go to the Church only on important feast days and important occasions like baptism, first communion, confirmation, wedding and the like. The more

serious problem is that our educated people are agnostics and care only for material progress. They do not care for an ideological religion. In this respect even Liberation Theology in its ideological aspect is a luxury for the people. The only way to meet the situation is to communicate religion in cultural values. Even our most sophisticated people are not aggressively anti-religious. They show their religiosity to please a grandmother or their wives or when they want their baby to be baptized according to tradition. In their heart of hearts they are religious people. Another hopeful sign is that ours is a youthful church. If you look at people who come to church and attend the functions they are mostly the young people and not the old as elsewhere. The reason for this is the active groups promoted by the church to discuss and decide upon all aspects of life particularly from a social and cultural angle. This is our only way to get back into the lives of the people through the cultural door the religion they tend to throw out through the door of ideology.

An important sign of hope with regard to the intellectuals is what is known as the International Movement of Catholic Intellectuals. In our country its membership is not high in numbers, but still strong enough to make an impact. Last month it held a three day seminar here. Its theme was "The Future of the World and our Present Responsibilities". We cannot write off the intellectuals and concentrate on the common people. The elite wields a decisive influence in the conscious and responsible course of society. Religion is not a *fait accompli* and it can never be taken for granted. Only by keeping up our efforts to make it relevant to the needs and concerns of the people can it maintain its transformative momentum.

Jorge Alvarez Calderon

The Word in History

(Conversation with Manuel Diaz Mateos S. J., Lima, Peru)

Jeevadharma: Father, you are a New Testament scholar and also a Liberation Theologian. How do you, first of all, relate your reading of the Gospels to the struggle for liberation found in other religious scriptures, for example, of Buddhism and Hinduism, which are liberation religions (liberation from within man), rather than redemption religions (liberation by an outside saviour)?

Fr. Mateos: My approach here is clearly defined by St. Paul in his speech at the Areopagus: I am preaching the "Unknown God" whom you already worship. This is not simply a clever introduction but a clear statement of what the Bible is all about. We have already removed the radical difference between God's self-disclosure in creation and His revelation in the Bible. It is the same God who reveals himself in both. It is the same God who reveals himself in other religious scriptures also from the inner liberating experience of the Spirit working in all hearts. This means that we cannot take the Bible as scripture in an exclusivistic sense, it has to be taken with all the various self-manifestations of God in human history.

J: Then what is unique and special to Christian revelation?

M: The unique emphasis of Christianity in Scripture and revelation is Christ, the incarnate Word of God. Christ is central to the Church, which is penetrated through and through by the dynamism of the Word. The Church preaches a Word that became flesh in the history of human beings, a Word that descends, acts and saves. "Christ is present...in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church", says Vatican II (S.C 7). Divine revelation is not a bunch of "truths", some esoteric doctrine, that God communicates to humanity. It is what God said, did and does, that makes revelation. We know that one can communicate even when one is silent. The Biblical conception of the word is more profound than the communicating of abstract truths. The Word of God is "the clear and perennial

fountain of life" (DV, 21). The Vatican document on Divine Revelation gives the fundamental hermeneutical principle for reading the Bible: "by scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ" (DV 24). The Word is a person, the Word is God, everything is oriented towards him and everything is related to him. Encountering the person of the Word, one is moved from within by the Spirit, and is led to the person of the Father. This community of divine persons is the final goal of human liberation, a liberation that starts from within man culminates in the social liberation of fellowship.

"What new element does Christ bring?" asks St. Ireneus in his polemic against the Jews, and himself answers: "He brings all the novelty that is capable of renewing man and the world" (*Adv. Haeres.* IV, 34). Christ brings a new relationship to God. The sacred is no longer a separate space, but only a sign and symbol of the consecration of the whole. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days", says Christ (Jn. 2:19). The novelty of the Christian worship consists in the transformation and integration of the whole life into the liturgy. St. Paul is a major witness of this vision of Christian life as liturgy, the bringing together of bread and word into a single expression.

J. But the Word is also historical. How may we bring the different conceptions of Scripture to a common religious history of humanity?

M. Christ is the Word become flesh and as such his incarnation is in the centre, founding and explaining all incarnations. The union between faith and history is a direct consequence of the incarnation and is a fundamental and original datum of Christianity. Therein has God sought his interlocutors. The word is neither atemporal nor impersonal. To affirm that the Word is incarnate is to affirm the historical character of revelation. In fact, the Bible is not a doctrine of salvation, but a history of salvation.

J. What does this historical character actually mean?

M. It means not only that history is the stage for revelation (it has happened in history and not in mythic place), but also that revelation has a history: it is progressive, and what history reveals and is constitutes the revelation. Finally revelation of the word launches out into history and does not take us out of it. "The words of God, expressed in human language, have been

made like human discourse, just as of old, the Word... when he took to himself the weak flesh of humanity, became like other men" (DV 13). The incarnation of Christ is the definitive incarnation of the Word which founds and explicitates other incarnations both in the past and in the future. God speaks through human beings and in human language (DV 12).

J. What is the special contribution of Liberation Theology towards the understanding of Sacred Scripture?

M. What Liberation Theology says in this respect is not anything new. It is only stressing an old truth: You cannot deny the "flesh" in the Scripture without denying the divine word itself. In order to understand the word one has to see it as incarnate in language, in history, in culture. If one tries to take the content of Scripture as a set of abstract principles or truths without taking into account the concrete socio-cultural and historical situation in which that word was proclaimed, one misunderstands the Bible. This is the main problem with German hermeneutics. They took the actual historical, cultural situation as mere context, or occasion, external to the "universal" truths communicated. The books of the Bible were written in specific moments, circumstances and situations in dialogue with them and not isolated from them. The divine inspiration should be understood as co-ordinated with those circumstances and not abstracted from the human author of the historico-cultural moment. The word was immediately and directly addressed to those people and only indirectly to us, as something to be reflected upon heuristically setting aside dogmatism. Liberation theology is a serious effort to give a Christian response to a situation of socio-economic injustice, exploitation, discriminations, inequalities.

J. In my short experience of the life of the people here in Peru I have to say that Liberation Theology is a sort of pastime of a few theologians. The big majority of common people live with their statues, rituals and superstitions, and the intellectuals are completely alienated from the Church!

M. We have to say that Liberation Theology is very young and has not penetrated the lives of people in great depth. Its ideological part may be above the understanding of ordinary people. The elite, too preoccupied as it is with the social, economic and political problems may not care much about theology. But the practical

part of Liberation Theology, the actual conscientization and involvement of people in their problems, their concerted effort to cope with the situation without losing hope, are positive signs. Even their rituals cannot be said to be superstition. That is the way the common man expresses even his most sublime experience of faith.

J. Look at the bishops. The Archbishop of Lima is an arch-conservative; and so are also the archbishops of Cusco and Arequipa and of every other important city in Peru. If these are interested only in their status and privileges, who is going to carry out in practice the high ideals of liberation theology?

M. This is the difference between the Word as life and religion as power. The Vatican Curia is primarily interested in maintaining its hold on this section of the church. When the flush of enthusiasm at an exciting moment of change is over, what lasts are the structures. So it wants as bishops only people who are obedient and loyal, in a word, safe. The apostolic nuncio is the one behind the scene making decisions regarding appointments and practically everything else. To a certain extent it is the fault of the bishops. Actually the nuncio is not a member of the bishops' conference. But the bishops voluntarily gave that membership to him and he sits there and controls everything. Even the bishops are suspicious about one another: Who may be reporting against whom and what will be the consequences? We are all human beings and we have first to be liberated from our own fears if we should act by the liberating life of the Word.

J. I got a chance to go through the "Documento de Consulta, Nueva Evangelizacion Promocion Humana Cultura Cristiana", put out by the Latin American Episcopal Conference in preparation for its fourth meeting scheduled for 1992 in Santo Domingo. With so many of you excellent theologians around how could they bring out such a document justifying the atrocities of the Spanish conquistadores and presenting Christianity in such abstract theoretical terms?

M. It is definitely a silly document. But none of the Liberation Theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez or Leonardo Boff was allowed to make any contribution to that. We are all suspect. But we are preparing our own document for it. Only through struggle can we achieve anything. It is good that somebody brought out such a document. It shows how absurd the traditionalist approach is.

J. According to Vatican II there should be very many preachers of the Word (DV 23). The other day I attended the area clergy conference of the whole district of Las Flores. Among the thirty or forty who were present there was not a single Peruvian priest, and only two Peruvian sisters! Is it not ridiculous that the Church in India with Christians forming hardly three percent of the population should send priests to minister to you Catholics here in Peru, constituting 70-90% of the population?

M. Here again it is not lack of priestly and religious vocations, but the question of handling them. The policy of Rome is very rigid. I am not saying that priests should be allowed to marry. But there are married laymen in excellent standing who are willing to be ministers of the word. Why not ordain them? As for the district of Las Flores, it is a developing area with new settlements. So Peruvians are saying let the foreigners come, spend their money and build churches. But missionaries from abroad cannot solve our problem. I came here from Spain in 1956, became a Jesuit novice, was ordained in 1969 and worked here ever since. There is a saying that when foreigners come natives leave and those who come do not stay, doubly complicating the situation. The word has to take root in the soil and grow by its own native resources, and it has to wrestle with the native problems. Only the sons of the soil can do this with full understanding and commitment.

Theology and Social Thought

The Challenge of Particular Sociologies

The challenge to the Church presented by the different religions of the world is somewhat analogous to the problem presented by various types of sociologies and political theories. In both the problem is that of the particular versus the universal, of the immediate and concrete in relation to the transcendent: A religion is particular on account of the particular culture in which it is historically formulated and presented. The decadence in recent times of philosophical theology itself is a problem of philosophy rather than of the message of faith on which theology reflects. For us here in Peru the challenge of sociologies and political theories is more relevant than that of other religions. So I shall discuss the relationship of theology to social thought and what I say will apply by analogy to our relationship to other religions.

Wolf Lepenies speaking about the situation in the Sorbonne University of Paris at the beginning of this century, says: In the interior of the university the place of honour is given to Victor Hugo and Louis Pasteur. Outside, the Place de Sorbonne is dominated by the statue of Auguste Comte. Literature as well as the natural sciences have their fixed place in the university; sociology is looking for an alliance with the literary left to defend its necessity and to make its productivity felt. It is not by accident that in Latin America Liberation Theology had to look for a similar mixture of sources, and that it seeks to enrich itself by a revaluation of the ethnic and cultural past in the whole Third World.

Sociological theories have a great power today to attract attention, but they have not taken away from philosophy its lead with regard to truth. Just as in philosophy, in sociology too we have a great many partial visions. From the side of empiricism there are objectivist theories like neopositivist sociologies and microfunctionalism, subjectivist sociological analyses like the

Weberian schools, symbolic interactionism and psychological sociology, and macro theories that declare the social as a reality by itself, like the critical theory of society, the Frankfurt school and Marxism. Each one of these sociological lines of thinking has its own specific vision of social reality regarding the behaviour of individuals, interactions among them, and societies and social systems. Social sciences do not exist as a unitary science. Theology has to confront a great plurality of sciences, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, linguistics, economics, politics, sciences regarding human conduct, communication, jurisprudence, criminology, social psychology, pedagogy, social philosophy and science of religion. Sociology itself is in full process of specialization, like the sociology of industrial enterprise, of organization, of economy, of finance, of communication, of literature, of culture and the like. The problem here is that theology's use of the social sciences to articulate its message has the epistemological assumption that the integration of these social sciences to theology depends unilaterally on theology. Seen from the side of the sciences, this would give theology a certain right of preferentially selective and syncretic plagiarism and at the same time the status of a metascience. This would be unacceptable to the social sciences. Theology, both the social doctrine of the Church and Liberation Theology, has the full freedom for receiving the results of the social sciences. But it has to integrate the sciences as sciences complete with all the requirements of the scientific community of today.

But the social doctrine of the Church in its magisterial forms shows very little intention to integrate the social sciences to theology. Rather it uses the common opinions regarding the situation of man to indicate from the side of Christian ethics a solution to the more urgent social conflicts. There is an apparent precaution that it does not identify itself with a determinate school or current of the social sciences. Liberation Theology in its general form integrates in its theology only those theoretical elements and only elements from those particular currents of thought that serve to legitimize its determinate political eschatology. It has no great interest in the framework of the social sciences as such except for an intense theological penetration of those social elements that serve as the motive force of the movement. The reflection on social sciences in theology, either in social doctrine or in liberation

theology, does not hold before it the scientific situation, and does not confront the problematic and the reasons proper to those sciences but only selects a perspective which supports its own proper discourse. An examination of the works of J. B. Metz, J. Hoffner, Cl. Boff and others can clearly bear this out. The whole international theological outlook today is as if in theology anything goes!

The problem here is that we are dealing with a situation implying three distinct scientific disciplines with their different requirements and characteristics. The question basically is ecclesiological, how Christians as a Church should act morally and pastorally in the present world. Ecclesiology has its roots in the earlier creeds and liturgies. The fundamental concepts are of communion and participation. So ecclesiology has its roots both in theology and sociology. It refers to a world of the social situation of man, the immediate field of the social sciences. In order that faith may regain its authenticity the new evangelization has to be a process of inculturation, making faith and the believing community relevant to the social and cultural reality of today. In our present Western ecclesial tradition it is not easy for the believers to appreciate another culture or another religion. This means that the new evangelization should break down the social and cultural barriers built up during the past centuries even to appreciate our native Andean culture.

The basis of action, however, is theology, the belief in God the Creator, the Incarnation that raises human beings to the dignity of the Son of God, and the presence and activity of the Spirit in our life and in the world. To do justice to the actual world in which we live we should start with a social analysis, its theoretical framework, method and empirical data expressed as clearly as possible. This is a field of great variety and great flexibility. Even in a small country like Peru there is a great cultural and social diversity: for example, the position and role of women in a country place like Ayakucho, where my religious confreres work, is completely different from that of the city of Lima. Besides, there are good many social models, theories and methods. What is important here is to state clearly what empirical data and actual problems one is dealing with, what definite social model one is using. If this is clearly stated there is scope for further empirical

investigation and a critical examination of the validity of the model itself. I state this against the aggressive theological blanketing of all diverse social situations as one, and all social methodology as one. To say the least, this is simplistic. Secondly one has to state what the actual ethical and pastoral options are in a given situation. Here the Latin American pastoral theology compromises itself to a great extent. When the social sciences seek to clarify a social reality, their option is simply the movement towards change. This cannot be the sole scope of pastoral action. The proper options the Church and its theology have in the face of a disturbing social reality are first and foremost an internal conversion and motivation of individuals, the will to change one's social situation in view of one's transcendent and supernatural goal, the decision to do what is immediately possible and prudent, the unwavering hope in all situations and the consciousness of one's personal duty. Here one can easily fall into a deontological generality, "we are obliged to change the lot of the poor" without a clarification of the basic, immediate and long-range steps towards that improvement. Some even take such a radical attitude towards all existing social institutions as to call for their total change immediately. A clear statement of options that are practically possible can avoid irresponsible wishful thinking, or fatalism at the other extreme. A serious theology should keep clearly the distinction among the three scientific areas and their relative autonomy, which always implies a certain healthy tension among them.

Latin American theology is above all Liberation Theology, which takes seriously the social mission of the Church as a constitutive dimension of it. It emphasizes to the greatest extent human freedom and dignity, joined with the principle of "the greater good of the greatest number possible". No one can quarrel with this high ideal, since no theologian will want a growing impoverishment of the poor. The difference of opinion is only regarding the methodology that is tied to a particular social and political ideology which is often totalitarian. Even the "praxis" has its definite ideological overtones. The "political theology" of Gutierrez, Asseman, Scannone, and Shaull, the "historico-philosophical" group of Dussel, the pedagogical school of Freire and Illich, the prophetic theology of H. Camara, Fragosa and Proano, are different ideological groupings. It will be simplistic and offensive to call them Socialists or Marxists. But the common

problem with all of them is a moralization of their models of social analysis. These people who defend freedom so much, are at the same time so dogmatic about their own particular social positions that they will not tolerate other positions. That moralization excludes the free discussion of social means against poverty and a discussion of the analytical models and their empirical evaluation.

What we look for in theology today is inculturation, and this needs a proper understanding and critical evaluation of culture. It would be ideal if it could be shown that the demands of the sciences are also at the same time the demands of an integral theology, and that the scientific presentation of the significance of a problem is at the same time presenting a problem in theology. Instead of raising a particular model of social analysis to the traditional absolutist image of theology, one has to bring theology itself to the empirical and practical level of human life. Today there is no danger of a theological imposition on the scientific-political vision. But theology has to play a specific role sanctioned by history, namely, Scripture, the Creed and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, all to be communicated faithfully in a context of cultural pluralism. Theology does not hold the task of dissolving faith of the Church in a cheap rationalism. Is not the present agnosticism and its irrational consequences an indication of a serious failure at present of theology with regard to its basic objectives? There is no question of an 'absolute' method as implied by Hegel. Those absolutist assumptions taken as truths in the past have to be discarded. Neither is science marketing an arbitrarily collected heap of trivialities. It deals with the experience, relationships and order of truth. A theological method should show ways to institute a discourse on how God discloses himself and how it is possible to respond to him. One has to transcend once and for all the exclusivistic and particularistic perspectives in theology.

This last point is particularly significant in our relation to other religions. Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism all present approaches to the ultimate concerns of human life from their particular historical, cultural perspectives. A non-exclusivistic approach to faith will readily integrate their insights. If one is fully committed to one's faith all other perspectives, whether religious,

cultural or social can only enrich it. If one absolutizes a particularist outlook like a particular model of social analysis one becomes a prisoner to it, and faith will be the casualty.

Here in Peru we have a particular problem. A great section of our population is culturally at a pre-modern stage and they are being catapulted into a post-modern world. Church does not have adequate cultural and social models to face this situation. All our ecclesial models took shape in Europe through the period of modernity. Through the same process of modernity did the European models of social transformation also evolve. Karl Marx, Max Weber and others were children of modernity and grew with its methodology. Even Habermas has not outgrown the idealism of modernity. The principal models of social analysis incorporated into or supposed by the different liberation theologies suffer from this idealist handicap of the modern period. Similarly the social thought that inspires the violence of the Sendero Luminoso (the Luminous Path, the violent Left of Peruvian politics) has its origin in the leftist movements elsewhere and it only uses the cultural terminology merely as a pretext to gain its own political ends. Only by freeing ourselves from such restrictive and exclusivistic presuppositions can theology really serve the cause of the poor.

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Paul Ricoeur's Religious Hermeneutics

Paul Ricoeur (1913 —) is one of the greatest contemporary Western philosophers. Though rooted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, his philosophy is predominantly hermeneutical, especially his later writings. Being a staunch Lutheran, Ricoeur's religious hermeneutics is confined to interpretation of biblical texts¹. In this article we shall analyse the important aspects of Ricoeur's religious hermeneutics as expressed in his interpretation.

The relationship between the two Testaments, Old and New, was the main problem in the early Christian community and this is a hermeneutical problem. Originally, there were not two Testaments but only one. With the emergence of the New, the Old lost its pristine value. The Christ-event made the entire Jewish economy appear old. But there is a hermeneutical problem here. The new event and the birth of a new Scripture, did not automatically do away with the old one. What happened is only a mutation of meaning. This mutation of meaning governs the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. In fact, the whole problem of allegory in the early church was centred around the hermeneutical problem of the relation between the two Testaments. Thus, Christian preaching has had a hermeneutical function from the very beginning.

According to Ricoeur, the christian faith is closely related to hermeneutics. Faith is constituted by what he calls the new being or the 'issue of the text'. But it does not mean that faith can be reduced to linguistic treatment. Faith is, in fact, the limit of all

1 See Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutic" *Semais*. An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism, 4 (1975) (Hereafter cited as BH), pp. 125-30
"Philosophy and Religious Language", *Journal of Religion* 54 ('74), p.81
"Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics" *Studies in Religion, Sciences religieuses* 5 (1975), p. 20

hermeneutics and the non-hermeneutical interpretation; hermeneutics is neither the first nor the last word in understanding faith. Yet, faith cannot be separated from the movement of interpretation. For, as he says, "Biblical faith relies on constantly renewed interpretation of sign posts, like the exodus in the Old Testament and the resurrection in the New Testament." Faith is not an act that can be reduced to any act of speaking or writing; it is the origin of all interpretation and in that sense represents the limit of any hermeneutic interpretation.

But it is always within a language that religious experience is articulated. Faith is never an immediate experience. It is only within a network of texts that faith can be transmitted to different age and culture. Faith can, therefore, never be separated from language. That is why Ricoeur says that faith is self-understanding in the face of the text, the attitude of one who accepts being interpreted as he interprets the text. He calls it the hermeneutical constitution of the biblical faith.

I. Ricoeur's Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture

The hermeneutical science began as a science of interpretation of the Bible. In course of time, however, it began to be applied to non biblical texts as well. Consequently, hermeneutics developed into two separate disciplines, namely, biblical hermeneutics and general or philosophical hermeneutics. Gradually, general hermeneutics underwent tremendous progress, while biblical hermeneutics remained bogged down to textual exegesis. But in Ricoeur we see a great attempt to make extensive application of the general hermeneutics to the biblical one. The main issues in Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory are the dynamics of the transition from speech to writing, the importance of the concept of work (literary), the power of the text to project a world as well as to serve as a mediation of self-understanding, and the philosophy of metaphor and poetics. According to Ricoeur, these issues of general hermeneutics must also be applied to biblical hermeneutics.

An important principle in general hermeneutics is, "To understand is to understand oneself before the text". This principle is applied to the interpretation of the Bible. Even though biblical hermeneutics is a particular case of general hermeneutics. Ricoeur

emphasises the uniqueness of the former. The specificity of biblical discourse is derived from the central place of 'God reference' in it. The power of the biblical discourse to refer to God is ascribed to the multiple unified significations of the literary forms of narration, prophecy, hymn, wisdom and so forth in the Bible. The network of these partial discourses constitute theological discourse. Ricoeur finds the God-reference as a co-ordinator of these varied discourses which, taken together, constitute the field of interpretation.

Ricoeur, then, associates the biblical concept of revelation with the issue of the biblical text. Revelation is a trait of the biblical world. To reveal is to uncover what until then remained hidden. So for him, revelation designates the emergence of 'a different concept of truth than truth as 'adequation' regulated by the criteria of verification and falsification as held by the British analytic philosophy. This new concept of truth is an act of manifestation. He views revelation as the feature of the biblical world proposed by the text and the different ways of speaking about God in the Bible as linked to the revelatory power of the poetic language in general.

Ricoeur gives two warnings on biblical interpretation, namely, first, that we should not try to construct a theology of the word, which does not include initially and in principle the passage from speech to writing and, second, that we should ask this question about the relationship between speech and writing in christian preaching at the very origin of the problem of interpretation. The christian preaching, first, relates itself to an earlier writing which it interprets. Then, the new interpretation becomes itself a written text, as for example, Jesus' interpretation of the Torah. The hermeneutics of the Old Testament as a written text is implied by the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour. The new Christ event is transmitted by means of an interpretation of proclamatory signs already written down and available in the cultural community. All the Christological titles, for example, proceed from the written Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures: King, Messiah, High Priest, Suffering Servant, Logos etc.

An existing text is, thus, interpreted in the new preaching which in turn becomes a new writing. This relationship between speech and writing is constitutive of christian preaching. So, the chain, speech-writing-speech or writing-speech-writing is an

important hermeneutical dimension of biblical discourse. In this chain reaction, sometimes speech mediates between two forms of writing, as Jesus' speech does between the two Testaments, Old and New; and sometimes, writing mediates between two types of speech as the Gospels mediate between the preaching of the primitive church and all subsequent preachings.

Ricoeur sees in this chain "the condition of the possibility for a tradition in the fundamental sense of the transmission of a message"². Tradition is not, therefore, just a supplementary source of our faith, but the historical dimension of the process which links speech and writing to each other. Writing causes distancing. It detaches the message from its speaker, from its initial situation and from its primitive destination. As a result we have different interpretations of Scripture at different ages in its history of interpretation; and so it becomes an integral part of biblical interpretation.

As an important application of general hermeneutics to biblical hermeneutics Ricoeur says that the primary task of hermeneutics is not to proceed immediately to a decision on the part of the reader, but to allow what he calls the world or being of the biblical text' to unfold itself. He identifies this being with the biblical concept of 'a new world', 'a new birth' etc. The revelation of the biblical writings, he says, is not immediately carried by psychological intentions of the author but mediately by the structures of the work. The different forms of biblical writings are therefore important in themselves. The power of revelation is not confined to any particular form of writings but consists in the contrast and convergence of all the forms of discourse in Scripture.

Ricoeur views the world proposed by the Bible as the ideal form of the world projected by literary work in general. But, at the same time, he insists that the world of the biblical text transforms the world of ordinary experience. Even though the ordinary language and the biblical language are interrelated, Ricoeur reminds us that one cannot identify the biblical concept of God

2 Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Utopia and Faith", *Protocol of the Seventeenth Colloquy*, 4 November 1975, The Centre for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, The Graduate Theological Union and the University of California (Berkeley), (1976), p. 7.

with the philosophical concept of being. It is because "the biblical God presupposes the total content constituted by the entire gravitational field of stories, prophecies, laws, hymns etc"³. This is true also about 'Christ' which signifies everything connected with Christ's Incarnation with its connotations of sacrifice, love etc. The cross and resurrection give to the word 'God' a special significance which the word 'Being' does not possess.

II. The Poetic Dimension of Religious Language

Ricoeur interprets the biblical language as 'poetic texts' and what he says about the biblical texts can be extended to religious language in general. By saying that biblical texts are 'poetic language' Ricoeur does not mean that they are just one type of poetic texts. As religious language, they have something specifically religious about them and may therefore be called 'religious poetics'. The gospel parables best exemplify the poetic nature of biblical language. Hence, Ricoeur analyses the gospel parables in his philosophy of hermeneutics.

In fact, the interpretation of the gospel parables is one of the most important part of Ricoeur's interpretation of religious language. In compliance with many of the New Testament scholars, he gives a prominent place to the parables in the corpus of the New Testament writings. According to Norman Perrin, the American New Testament scholar, the interpretation of the parables of Jesus is the most fascinating of all the aspects of New Testament scholarship. He views the concept of the 'Kingdom of God', as the ultimate referent of the parables and even calls the gospel parables the 'Parables of the Kingdom'⁴ on which Ricoeur also agrees with him⁵.

The parables of Jesus were not written by Jesus himself, but were orally delivered. They were the result of a considerable process of oral and written transmission and interpretation. They have passed through at least forty years of transmission and re-interpretation, both oral and written⁶. One has to take these factors seriously when one interprets the parables.

3 Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics" *Studies in Religion. Science religieuses* 5 (1975), p. 28

4 Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 199-202

5 See *BH*, p. 33

6 See N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, pp. 3-4

Taken in themselves the gospel parables are radically profane stories⁷. But they are stories in which an ordinary understanding of reality is interrupted, by the introduction of something extra-ordinary, to make way for a re-orientation of that understanding. Through this process a momentary glimpse of the transcendent is obtained.

The parable obtains this extra-ordinary power on account of the extra-ordinary religious symbol therein, namely, 'the Kingdom of God'. It is this powerful symbol which makes the parable a religious type of discourse. As Van den Hengel observes, this function in the parables is part of a common function of language which has the power to break the barriers of its contingency in order to reach the truth. The parables, as a religious language, have the power to break through in the world of transcendence and to refer to God. This power of the language is not a creation of man but something inherent in the language itself, which we only discover⁸.

As poetic language, the parables teach us through what Ricoeur calls 'reorientation by disorientation'. According to him, "To listen to the parables of Jesus is to let one's imagination be opened to the new possibilities disclosed by the extravagance of these short dramas"⁹. The parables are words addressed to our imagination and we should therefore let their poetic power display itself within us¹⁰. They speak about God in a way which Ricoeur calls the 'naming of God'. He distinguishes a narrative style and a metaphorical process in the parable which manifest the poetic character of the parables.

Since the parables are, in addition to their religious dimension, a combination of a narrative form and a metaphorical process, Ricoeur analyses them from these two angles. A parable is *a narrative* but at the same time, it is more than just an ordinary narrative. The story in the parable refers to something other than what is told by the ordinary events narrated in the story. Ricoeur

7 Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables", in C. Reagan and D. Stewart, eds, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. An Anthology of his Works*, Boston Beacon Press, 1978, p. 239

8 See Van den Hengel, "Faith and Ideology", *Eglise et theologie* 14(83), p. 81

9 Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables", in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. An Anthology of His Work*, op., cit p. 245

10 Ricoeur, "Naming God", p. 223

inquires how the story in the parable gets this special 'parabolic' reference. Looking at the parable from the *metaphorical dimension*, he examines how, as a metaphor, it takes the mediating form of a narrative. He then applies fiction's power of re-describing reality, to the narrative form of the parable. He calls it a poetic approach as it draws attention to the productivity of the narrative. Thus, the parable can be said to have those characteristics which Aristotle gives to poetics¹¹. As poetics, the parable is a *muthos* (an heuristic fiction) which has the mimetic power of redescribing human existence¹².

Even though Ricoeur emphasises the poetic dimension of the parable he does not rule out the importance of a structural analysis for its interpretation. He asserts that structural analysis must be a necessary part of a hermeneutics of the parables¹³. In so far as structuralism is an ideology, it treats any 'message' as a meaning of its underlying 'code': that is to say, it makes the code essential and the message unessential. But Ricoeur criticizes structural analysis for not recognizing that it is possible to pass from code to message. This passage, now, becomes evident if one recognizes the discourse character of the text. More in particular, the concept of language as discourse raises the question of reference. In contrast according to structuralism, the coding of the message itself becomes the message which is considered a kind of epiphenomenon of codes, forming the structure¹⁴. The discourse, on the other hand, refers forward to an extralinguistic reality; it refers backward to a speaker and communicates with an audience.

One important characteristic of the parable, according to Ricoeur, is its metaphorical dimension. It is only recently that scholars have started applying the concept of metaphor to parables. A. Julicher, the founder of modern exegesis of parables, explicitly discarded the notion of metaphor in the parables. But Ricoeur disagrees with Julicher's approach to metaphor, for he feels that Julicher is not right in his interpretation of metaphor in which he identifies the Hebrew '*maschal*' with the 'parable' of Greek rhetoric¹⁵.

Thus in Ricoeur's view, the parable is not only a narrative

11. Ricoeur, 'Creativity in Language', *Philosophy Today* 17 (1973), p. 111.

12. *SH*, p. 75. 13. *BH*, p. 64. 14. *SH*, p. 50. 15. See *BH*, p. 90.

but also a *metaphorical discourse*. It is the plot in the parable which gives it the quality of a metaphor, which gives a dramatic effect to the parable. The parable is much more than the fictitious story narrated in it, it is also related to human experience outside the narrative. It is this metaphorical dimension which gives the parable its power to refer to human reality outside the narrative. But how does one know that the parable is referring to some outside reality? Here Ricoeur gives the same answer which is given by Dominic Crossan, the American biblical scholar, namely, that we are motivated to do so by the 'normalcy' of the story. The oft accompanying phrase in the parables, "Let those who have ears hear", is pointed out as an indication of its orientation to the human life situation. Moreover, Ricoeur takes the special linguistic nature of parables (which he calls the 'extravagance' in the parables) as an indication of their orientation to the human life situation¹⁶.

The parables make sense only if they are taken together, for they constitute a collection, a 'corpus'. The same is true about the corpus of 'sayings' (*Logia*) attributed to Jesus in the Synoptics. Ricoeur puts into one category the eschatological 'sayings', the proverbial sayings and the parables because of their common metaphorical or poetic nature. They may, therefore, be translated into one another. In the light of this observation, Ricoeur says that a narrative may be understood as a parable if it is convertible into a proverb or an eschatological saying.

The parables are related in a special way to the 'deeds' of Jesus, especially the 'miracle deeds'. As Ricoeur observes, "Miracles indeed are stories given as true, parables are stories given as fictions"¹⁷. They mean the same thing. The parables draw attention to the 'miraculous' dimension of time while the miracle stories receive from preaching their 'parabolic dimension'. The parable must, therefore, be understood in the context of the whole Gospel and in its relation to the 'sayings' and 'deeds' of the passion narrative and the subsequent redactory process which the Gospel underwent in its formulation¹⁸.

Ricoeur regrets that not enough attention has been given to the metaphorical dimension of the parable and feels that it is

16 BH, pp. 98-99

17 BH, pp. 102-103

18. BH, pp. 99-10

because the hermeneutical value of metaphor has not yet been recognized. His theory of metaphor upholds the power of fictional language to refer to reality in a special way while it recognizes the legitimacy of the claim of the religious language to refer to transcendental truths. In addition, it recognizes the bond of religious language with ordinary language. The parables exemplify the religious form of metaphorical language.

III. The Uniqueness of Religious Language

Ricoeur considers the parable to be poetic language which has religious connotations. As religious poetics, it is unique in its own way. There are a number of factors which contribute to the specificity and uniqueness of this 'religious poetics'. According to Ricoeur, the parables in general refer to the 'Kingdom of God'. The idea of the '*Kingdom of God*' confers on the different modes of discourse in the parable their specific religious sense. It is only in conjunction with other modes of discourse that the parable functions as the parable of the kingdom. Taken in isolation, it remains a 'poetic' kind of discourse which can be applied directly to ordinary life without any specifically 'religious' meaning¹⁹. It is the idea of the 'Kingdom of God' which gives the special religious function to parabolic discourse. To quote Ricoeur's own words:

I propose to say that the expression 'Kingdom of God' is a limit-expression by virtue of which the different forms of discourse employed by religious language are modified and by that very fact converge upon an extreme point which becomes their point of encounter with the infinite²⁰.

It is in the proclamatory sayings the singularity of religious language is most evident. Ricoeur examines four such sayings in the Gospels: 1) "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15); 2) "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20); 3) "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'there!', for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Lk 17:20-21); 4) "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom

19 BH, p. 33. 20. BH, p. 109

of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force' (Mt 11:12)²¹. A transmutation of worldly existence is accomplished in the proclamatory sayings, the proverbs and the parables. The symbol 'Kingdom of God' is an index which points beyond the structure and even beyond the metaphorical dimension.

The specifically religious characteristics of parable, in addition to its being a poetic language, according to Ricoeur, is found in what he calls the 'extravagance' of the parables²². It is marked by the extra-ordinary in the ordinary. The dramatisation of the parable is marked by this extravagance.

Ricoeur cites a number of examples for the extravagance found in the parables:

Consider the extravagance of the landlord in the 'parable of the Wicked Husbandmen', who after having sent his servants, sends his son. What Palestinian property owner living abroad would be foolish enough to act like this landlord? Or what can we say about the host in the 'Parable of the Great Feast' who looks for substitute guests in the streets? Would we not say that he was unusual? And in the 'Parable of the Prodigal Son' does not the father overstep all bounds in greeting his son? ...What employer would pay the employees of the eleventh hour the same wages as those hired first? ...What 'small seed' would yield a huge tree where bird can nest? The contrast is hardly less in the 'Parable of the Leaven': surprise at the effect that exceeds its cause! And the 'parable of the Sower' is constructed on the same contrast...²³

It is through this kind of extravagance that the dramatisation of the parable is achieved and it is this extravagance that transforms the poetics of the parables into poetics of faith.

As previously stated, the parable is a poetic language but with a religious dimension. The religious language, in its turn, modifies poetic language by various procedures. Thus, there is a commonality between poetic language and religious language; but at the same time, religious language has its own specificity and uniqueness. In order to characterize this commonality as well as the uniqueness of religious language Ricoeur uses the term 'limit-expression' to refer to religious language. These limit-expressions

21. See BH, pp. 109-111

22. BH, p. 114.

23. BH, pp. 115-117.

correspond to what Ricoeur calls man's 'limit experiences'. Because of this idea of 'limit' involved in the parables, Ricoeur also calls the parables 'limit-metaphor'. Now, it may be asked, 'What power of redescription is attached to religious language as a limit expression or as a limit metaphor?' Ricoeur's answer is: 'The functioning of religious language as a limit expression, it seems to me, orients our research towards corresponding characteristic of human experience that we can call a limit experience²⁴. Religious language as limit expression is founded on man's limit experience which is the same as what Ramsey calls 'total commitment', 'odd personal discernment' or universal significance²⁵.

Ricoeur relates his concept of limit-experience to a similar concept in Karl Jaspers, namely, the idea of 'limit-situation' or 'boundary situation'. Jaspers names experiences like that of death, suffering, guilt and hatred as negative peak experiences which he also calls 'boundary situation' or 'limit situation'. Ricoeur extends what Jaspers states about the negative peak experiences to the positive or happy peak experiences, such as that of creation and joy as found in the parables of the Pearl and of the Lost Coin. Religious language abounds in such peak experiences²⁶.

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24. *BH*, p. 123

25. *BH*, pp. 126, 131.

26. *BH*, p. 128